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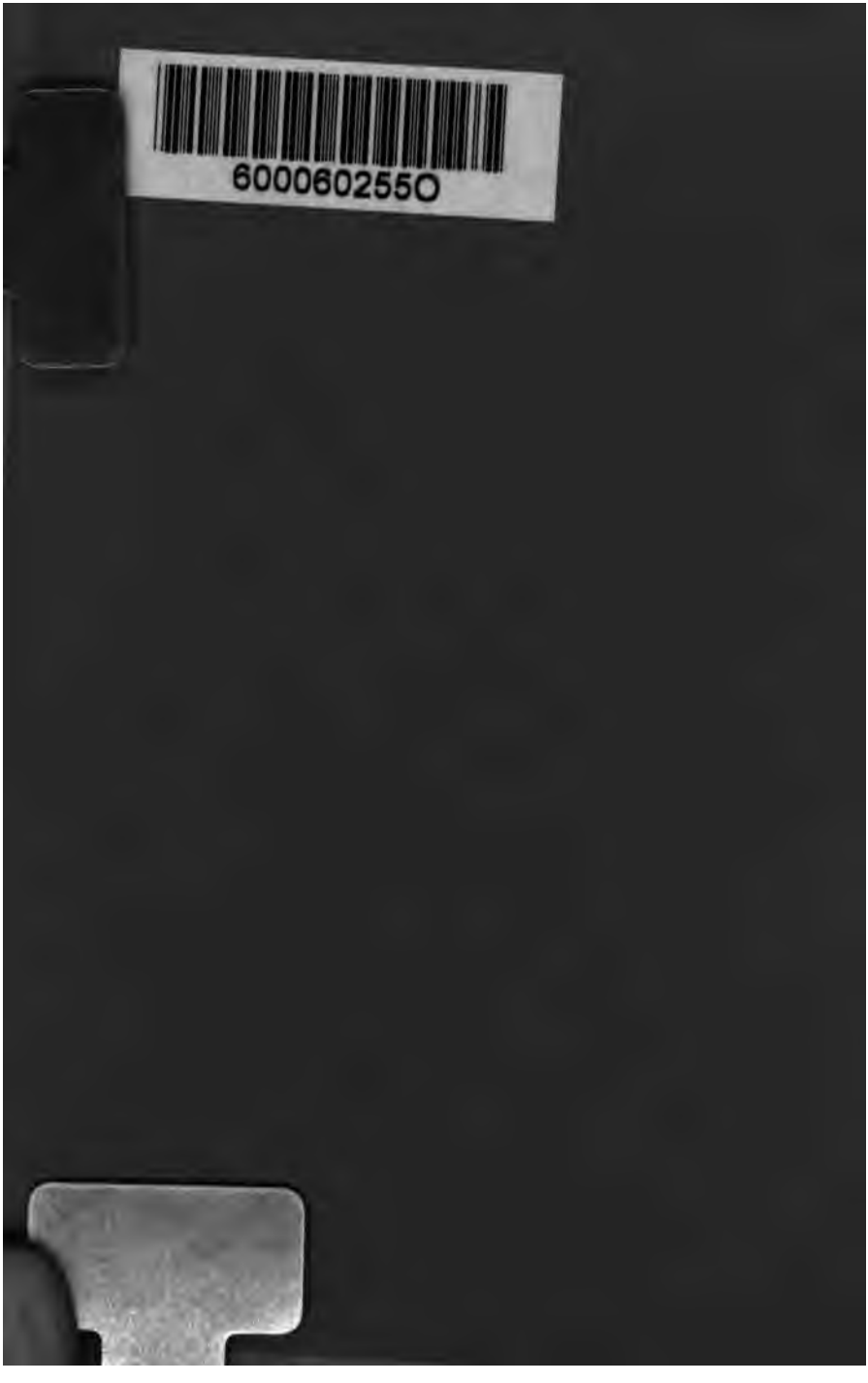
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BROTHER GABRIEL

By

THE AUTHOR OF

"KITTY"


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BROTHER GABRIEL.

VOL. I.

BROTHER GABRIEL

BY

M. BETHAM-EDWARDS

AUTHOR OF

"KITTY," "DOCTOR JACOB," "BRIDGET,"
"A WINTER WITH THE SWALLOWS,"
&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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BROTHER GABRIEL.

CHAPTER I.

THREE FRIENDS.

IT was as small a room as a human being could well inhabit, yet neither uncheerful nor unwholesome; still less was it wanting space for the severest necessaries of life —a bed, a chair, a table, and a bookshelf. In these the furniture consisted, nothing being there for grace except a finely-carved ivory crucifix hanging on the whitewashed wall. Through the window was seen a vast heart-reviving prospect. Close under the monastery gates lay villas embosom-

ed in green, stately streets gleaming amid avenues of lime and acacia, spire and dome past counting, the twin towers of a glorious old cathedral crowning all; and beyond, a broad bright river flowing towards the sea. Far away could be seen verdant banks and golden pastures on one side, on the other busy quays bristling with ships, and between the two, delicious little islands, half lawn, half copse, breaking the silvery expanse with fairy charm.

Such a panorama, matchless, perhaps, even in regions so favoured as this, lent atmosphere, space, and largeness to the little cell, and the absolute purity within, from spotless ceiling to snow-white floor, added to the natural beauty without, made it a retreat any scholar might have envied. The present occupant looked well content. He was young, only just twenty-three, and since his fourteenth year had known

no other world but the seminary and the cloister—a narrow one, it might seem to outsiders, yet, judging from his candid face, all that a healthily-constituted human being could desire. An habitual tranquillity, contrasted strongly with the unrest of ordinary mortals, was the first characteristic of those well-formed features; and next, none could fail to note the guilelessness stamped upon brow, eyes, and lips. He was pure-minded, he was happy; he was, moreover, largely endowed with beauty. The curly brown beard, tinged with gold, the large blue eye, the smooth white brow, the comely nose and mouth, were worthy of a great portrait-painter—all the more so as they belonged to a monk still wearing the mediæval cowl and frock of St. Francis. Cumbersome although this dress may be, its massive brown folds only relieved by the white cord forming a girdle, few can behold it without

emotion; and the young monk himself, who had only lately taken the perpetual vows of his order, symbolized in the hood now fastened to the garment with threads never to be unsewn, often thrilled with pious rapture as he made his simple toilette. What else did he need but the one ambition in course of fulfilment? A life devoted to holy things, quiet for scholarly pursuits, the society of kindred minds, and a perpetual holding aloof from the snares and the corruptions of the world. Within this circle he foresaw his years revolve in satisfied aspiration and serene self-sacrifice, till the allotted portion should be spent, and the gates of Heaven opened for his thirsting soul.

The daily routine of his existence was not very laborious or very ascetic. Except to rise at midnight all the year round to pray in the chapel—a rule ostensibly enforced by

way of subduing the flesh—perhaps fewer hardships were endured by the young Franciscan and his brethren than by ordinary mortals. Eight hours, in two equal portions, out of the twenty-four were set apart for sleep, six for private study and devotion, the rest were divided between meals, recreation, and such services as the community might require at the hand of each member. These consisted chiefly in teaching within the walls of the monastery, in officiating at the chapel, in begging for alms at certain seasons of the year, and in going out as missionaries among the poor of prescribed districts. All the household work was performed by lay brothers, who carried to each monk his cup of coffee and portion of bread at seven o'clock in the morning, who had considerable skill in the art of cooking, and who, by dint of unremitting exertions, kept every part of the building in that state of absolute

cleanliness hardly found elsewhere. There were hours when silence was imposed, it is true, but if the midday dinner was sometimes grimly solemn, the six o'clock supper would generally be positively hilarious, and much lively discussion would take place during the day, alike in library and in garden. One afternoon in the week was allowed for taking recreation outside the monastery, a privilege affording just that glimpse into the turmoil and fever of active life needed to bring into strong relief the unbroken serenity left behind.

Of this privilege the young monk frequently availed himself. He had a curious, eager mind, and, being a teacher of philosophy and metaphysics, felt it his bounden duty to acquire every kind of knowledge that came within his reach, not only knowledge of books and theories, but of men and things. He loved to wander through the busy streets,

and along the bustling quays of this pleasant, populous French city, familiarising himself, at least, with the surface of that many-hued, multifarious human life, about which he felt such inquisitiveness. And just as he thus turned from the quiet cloister to the crowded thoroughfare, would he lay aside St. Thomas Aquinas, and the Father of the Church, for the pages of Sir Walter Scott, and even contemporary novelists, in search of what he wanted, namely, an understanding of the human heart. He craved the supremacy only accorded to teachers of wide experience, and, at the onset of his career, had determined that, instead of narrowing his existence, he would widen it in so far as in him lay. Such intercourse with the outer world as was permitted him, he therefore enjoyed and utilized to the utmost.

It was now autumn, not a time of golden mist and purple haze, as in our dear native

land, but a shorter, intenser summer, with skies of deep unclouded blue, and glowing afternoons that melted, almost without twilight, into warm, starlit, transparent night. We are forced out of doors in these delicious climates, against our will, and the young Capucin, who found all days in the week good, liked his Thursdays not least of the seven, when the weather was perfect. No sooner had he quitted the monastery, and found himself among the careless loungers on the boulevard leading to the city, than his pulses quickened with fuller life, and his step became swifter and more elastic.

The brotherhood to which he belonged had only within the last three or four years established themselves here, a fact which accounted for the bareness and incompleteness of their structure, contrasting strangely, as it did, with the vast and splendid monastic institutions on every side.

Each part was brand-new, monastery and chapel, garden and garden wall, and as economy had been the first point studied, the congeries of building in its present state was an eyesore instead of an ornament to the landscape. The site selected nicely marked the division between town and country. On one side, stretched the superb domains of merchant princes, new châteaux in the style of Henri Quatre and Louis Quinze, parks modelled on English patterns, and hanging gardens that sloped from terrace to lawn; on the other, lay large open spaces, planted with fruit-trees and vegetables, the modest yet not unpoetic territories of market gardeners, with a wide plane-bordered suburban road or boulevard running between. In the height of summer this road was dusty in the extreme, the white sheen of the masonry made a painful glare to the eyes, and the light sandy soil

was burning under the feet; but already a few autumn showers had fallen, and though not a cloud flecked the deep violet sky, and not a breath stirred the leaves, a walk on such a September afternoon was a pleasant thing.

So thought the young monk, as he stepped out of his cell, traversed the bare corridor, and let himself out by a little postern built in a side wall. The door of the chapel, a small, naked building, disfigured by much crude and tawdry decoration, stood open, and entering for a moment, he murmured a prayer before the image of his patron saint, then passed into the sunlight.

Following the boulevard for half a mile, he came to a handsome square, on one side of which stood a Palais de Justice, imposing enough, and apparently large enough for the capital of France, descended two steep flights of stone steps—this curious city being built

terrace-wise, the upper portion looking down on the lower—and was now on a level with its antique quarter, fast undergoing a process of modernization, its quays, river, and almost countless bridges, its sombre, yet majestic Cathedral, flanked by the hotels, old and new, of the ancient nobility.

A few equipages were flashing hither and thither, graced by the richly-dressed daughters of self-made millionaires, for the blue blood of the place was generally as poor and proud as blue blood could be; there were nursery-maids, wearing the quaint head-dresses of their province, and their little charges wending their way to the Jardin des Plantes; a battalion of young soldiers exercising in the spacious Place Royale, the widest, most fashionable promenade in the city; peasant women, in odd costumes, going home from market, and other signs of life and activity; but nothing

to be compared with the gay aspect that the place would wear later on. In another month alike the country house and the sea-side villa would be deserted, and a stranger moving about these animated streets might fancy himself in Paris. At present only a sprinkling of wealth and fashion enlivened the bustle of the port, manufacturing town, and centre of commerce, for Les Ponts, or the City of Bridges, was all these.

The monk stopped before a block of substantially built, lofty mansions, let out in flats, ascended two dark flights of broad stone staircase, and ringing at a door on the third story, inquired in imperfect French for Monsieur Delmar.

"Yes, Monsieur Delmar is in, my brother," answered the servant, an honest-faced, elderly country-woman, whose French, strongly tinctured with provincial twang, sounded as foreign as her interlocutor's;

"but, my brother—" and here she hesitated, "a relation of Monsieur's, a lady, is with him at this moment."

"Come in, by all means," said a man's voice from within—a musical voice, that matched the looks and bearing of the speaker. "Father Gabriel, I entreat you not to go away. My visitor is a country-woman, of whom you have heard me already speak, a relation, moreover—my cousin Zoë."

Hardly hesitating, indeed, the monk acquiesced. He was accustomed to a certain amount of social intercourse, especially in his own country, where he doffed the monastic garb whenever he quitted the cloister to enter the world; and he took it much as a matter of course that his friend's friends should be his also. Both were exiles in a foreign land, each trusted and understood the other, and Delmar, being by twenty

years the elder man, might fairly—at least, in mundane affairs—be considered an authority.

So the two men joined the lady in the salon, an apartment that savoured of the scholar and of the smoker, the furniture consisting chiefly of rare books, old and new, and, it must be confessed, the atmosphere, in spite of the open windows, being strongly impregnated with tobacco.

Had the three personages now introduced, and talking easily and pleasantly together, been French citizens, especially natives of the scandal-loving city of Les Ponts, doubtless many a careless or cruel tongue would soon have been busy with their names. But a middle-aged American archæologist of acknowledged position, a sedate English teacher, just twenty-six, and an Irish monk, barely twenty-three, were even safe

from unkind comment in France. It is the privilege of our gloomy, phlegmatic insular character to be held immaculate in certain points of social intercourse, where the conduct of the most serious-minded of our neighbours would invariably call forth blame or suspicion; and by virtue of such immunity the three strangers could accidentally meet under Delmar's roof and hold a long conversation without losing caste.

Each possessed a physiognomy that a psychologist would have noted in a crowd. Delmar presented a strange contrast to the blooming health, beaming countenance, and boyish beauty of the monk, whilst, had they exchanged garments, he himself might have aptly realised our conception of mediæval scholar, or enthusiast of an ascetic type. All the fire of spiritual seeking and aspiration, all the light of a subtle intellect bent upon

solving the hardest problems of thought, all the passionate catching at truth, accredited to the world's early teachers, flashed out of his dark eyes, and were indicated in the play of his fine features. His pale face, slightly silvered hair, and limbs slender even to attenuation, moreover, betokened habits of unresting intellectual toil, and pondering over books carried to an unwholesome pitch.

The lady who sat between the two perhaps a little resembled Delmar in habitual expression and outline of feature, although their cousinship was exceedingly distant; it would most likely, indeed, have been altogether lost sight of, but for the protection such a relationship accorded to a girl living alone, and earning her bread in a foreign city.

When he had discovered, only a few weeks back, that a young Englishwoman

bearing his name was settled at Les Ponts, gaining, as he imagined, the precarious livelihood of a teacher, kindness and chivalrousness immediately prompted him to offer any services that lay in his power, a matter made all the easier by finding out that his family —now long since settled in America—had come from the same parent stock as her own.

They were thus recent acquaintances, and the use of the familiar Christian name implied an intimacy which, as yet, did not exist. She was much younger than he, but being also several years older than the monk, stood midway between the two in years, and above both, as it seemed to them, by reason of that sweet isolating fact of womanhood. Dressed almost as simply and severely as a nun, sedate at most times, yet with a capacity for mirth possessed by few, observant and certainly inquisitive—even for a woman—

about all that lay outside her quiet, monotonous existence, Zoë Delmar was as ready to talk with Father Gabriel upon serious topics as with her cousin Lionel.

"I hope my countrywoman—since we are all English in the larger sense of the word—likes her life in this fine old French city," began the monk, gazing intently on the sweet, serious face, for which the long folds of a semi-transparent black veil made a beautiful background. He at once, and with the egotism implanted by years of Jesuitical training, set himself to solve the especial problem of individual character so unexpectedly presented to him. To know was the first duty of recluse as well as worldling, and what knowledge was comparable to that of the human heart? The disconcerting scrutiny of her features, therefore, and impatience with which he awaited her answer to his impetuous question, meant inquisitiveness, not in

Zoë herself only—that is to say, his friend's cousin, and a possible acquaintance—but in the sum total of attributes, endowments, and weaknesses that make up an entity, a life, a soul.

"Yes, my brother," answered Zoë, feeling, after the first blush called forth by his gaze, as interested as himself, "at first I had no friends, and it was very lonely, but now I have nothing to complain of, and the Sisters are very good to me. The greater part of my teaching is done in the convents."

"You are nevertheless a Protestant, like my friend Delmar, are you not?"

Again Zoë slightly changed colour.

"My mother was Catholic, and as a child I was baptized into her Church," she said. "But were it not so, I could have no scruple in teaching these children. I live outside the convent, and only enter it for the purpose of giving my lessons."

"And what do you think of the Sisters?" asked the monk.

"They are very good to me," she repeated, showing by her manner that she was not to be questioned on this point either; whereupon Delmar came to her aid, and introduced a new topic, that of Father Gabriel's own life, of which he was always willing to talk, and talked enchantingly. If knowledge is power, is not speech also? and not even theology had been more carefully inculcated by his Jesuit professors, than elocution and eloquence. His ideas flowed readily, and it was no more possible for him to blunder in the selection of words, than for the fingers of a skilful musician to light on the wrong notes.

"Alas!" he said, when he had entertained his listeners for nearly an hour, "I must go now, and I have still so much to say, so much to hear, especially from you," he

added, turning to Zoë. "You see, we monks live mostly with ourselves and our books, and I am as ignorant as a child of many things you can teach me, and necessary for me to know. For instance, the difference between the plan of a girl's education here and among ourselves."

"What can you want to know of such matters?" asked Delmar, laying a playful hand on the young man's arm. "You are no Frère Ignorantin engaged in teaching little girls and boys; you instruct your fellow-monks only, and upon no humbler subjects than divine philosophy; you gather up knowledge like the bees their winter store for your own peculiar hive——"

"But the honey is formed for the delectation of all," answered Father Gabriel, gravely. "I am writing a work that shall be useful alike to the student and the scholar—a work that will be the occupation

of my best years. It is a History of Philosophy, which, of course, will embrace a treatise on education, and may very likely extend to forty volumes."

Neither Delmar nor Zoë could resist a smile at the ingenuousness with which this astounding statement was delivered, but the young monk did not for a moment dream of taking their look of amused dismay amiss.

"You think me too young to begin so arduous an undertaking?" he asked. "You forget how soon the mind ripens to maturity in the cloister. We have no distracting cares, no domestic vexations, no worldly business to disquiet us in our work, and mar our hours of lonely thought or study. Free and unencumbered as a bird, the spirit may thus soar, wending its way whither it list through the realms of serene contemplation."

"True; you have the better of us world-

lings in that respect," Delmar said, a shadow passing like a cloud over his features. "I doubt, Father Gabriel, whether you are not, after all, perhaps, the happiest person of my acquaintance."

"Nay, I am sure of it," the monk answered, with a candid, self-satisfied smile. "But we must discuss that question at some future time. I am constrained to go now."

"Well, come again as soon as you can. You are ever most welcome," Delmar said, shaking his friend's hand cordially.

"And your cousin—may I hope to see her occasionally?" Father Gabriel added, looking at the gentle, stately young woman, whose expressive face, to his thinking, wore almost a maternal look of tenderness and dignity.

Delmar, forbearing to answer, turned to Zoë, smiling a little maliciously at her dilemma. But she replied without the

slightest hesitation or embarrassment—

"Most surely. I know no one of my country-people here except Mr. Delmar, and shall be very glad to make your further acquaintance."

He thanked her, bowed in the friendliest fashion, then took his leave, and in a minute more they saw the brown-robed figure and tonsured head mingling with the gay crowd below.

CHAPTER II.

ZOË'S TAME SPARROWS.

"I FEAR it is too late now for our promised country walk," Delmar said, as soon as they were alone. "It is already half-past four o'clock, and by six, at this time of the year, the day is over."

"Yes, much too late," Zoë answered, with unfeigned regret in look and voice. "I was pleased to see Father Gabriel, but I am disappointed all the same. You promised to take me where the blackberries grow, and I have not tasted one this year."

"We will go to-morrow, then. The fine weather is sure to last, and the blackberries

too. Since I am forbidden your house by the over-punctilious Mademoiselle Huberte —whom, nevertheless, I respect from the bottom of my heart—we must meet here, or at the office of the omnibus."

"Poor Huberte! French manners and customs are to blame, not she, and if you paid visits to me whilst under her roof, she would soon lose, not only caste, but bread."

"Thank your lucky stars, then, that you were not born a Frenchwoman, and bring your blackberrying basket to-morrow at three o'clock. Will that do?"

"No—I have lessons all to-morrow afternoon at the Convent of the Visitation. It must be Saturday. What a long time to wait for the green lanes and the blackberries!" and, saying this, she looked so wistful that he said, hoping the proposition would afford some compensating pleasure,

"We will not say good-bye here, however. I will walk, at least, a part of the way home with you."

Zoë consented willingly. Though, by nature, happily constituted, and, by the circumstances of her life, fortified to a pitch of endurance in small matters beyond most women, she relished solitude no more than any other. Delmar's companionship pleased her just as naturally as spring pleases the birds, and the light of maternal eyes pleases an infant. Loneliness had been hitherto the one drawback in her existence. Since finding each other out, the oppressive weight of isolation seemed vanished as if by magic. He was only serviceable and kind, yet is not mere kindness ofttimes the better part of changeful days and years?

They crossed the square now alive with fashionable loungers, passed along a gay street crowded with vehicles, traversed a

bridge, then skirted the river-side in a part where all was ancient, deserted, dull. The bustling quays and the broad, bright stream flowing southward to the sea, lay at right angles to the road they were now following; but in order to understand the configuration of this curious city, aptly designated in local parlance as the City of a Hundred Bridges, a word or two of description is necessary. The river on which it stands, perhaps the most majestic of many-rivered France, not only bifurcates, making a score of bridges necessary instead of one, but is also joined in the centre of the town by another and smaller stream, navigable, nevertheless, and important as a means of communication with the north-lying regions of the western provinces, rich pastoral country to be described by-and-by. Thus on every side you have moving waters—silvery, turgid, or gaysome blue, as the case

may be, and if you walk from one end of the spider-like city to the other, you cross more bridges than some English counties can boast of. This peculiarity lent the place the picturesqueness and perpetual variety so striking to strangers. There was no sameness, no stagnation anywhere, and beyond dock and wharf, railway-station and suburban garden, a dozen miles off stretched the bright, south-westerly sea, whilst northward and eastward, lay fertile, historic provinces, orchard, vineyard, vegetable and fruit-garden, not only of Paris, but of London and cities farther off still. A land of Goshen was this, a land overflowing with milk and honey.

Zoë stopped her companion when they came to the upper end of a dreary-looking street, exactly the place in which you might expect to find a girl's school, and said, quite gravely, yet with a touch of feminine malice,

"You must not go any farther, please. Huberte's house is in sight."

"What superstition!" he answered, trying to have his way on this trifling point. "I am in duty bound to see you to the door."

"No," Zoë said, not at all peremptory, not caring in the least to have her way, only anxious to keep matters on the safest footing for his sake as well as for her own. "Will you never understand that, if once Huberte discovers any wrong in what I do, I shall have to give up seeing you altogether? I cannot injure my best friend."

"Adieu, then," he said, in a curt voice—"adieu till Saturday."

"Yes, adieu till Saturday," she replied.

They shook hands, and she hastened towards the school—a dark house in a dingy

street, on the front walls of which was printed, in large letters,

École Professionelle de Jeunnes Filles.

There was a rosy-cheeked little maiden, in white cap and blue pinafore, however, keeping watch in the porter's lodge, a canary singing over her head, and a large Angora cat purring on the sill of the tiny window behind which she mounted guard. And inside things were much cheerier than might have been supposed. As Zoë mounted the dingy stone staircase leading to the class-room a door flew open, and out rushed a score of bright-looking young girls, who, greeting her with a smile and a friendly, "Bon jour, Mademoiselle Zoë," caracoled downstairs, arm-in-arm or hand-in-hand, cheek to cheek, laughing, singing, fluttering like young birds let out of a cage. These scholars belonged mostly to the middle or

bourgeois class; being destined for governesses, tradeswomen, book-keepers, and so on, otherwise they must have walked downstairs demurely, have been accompanied by a maid, and worn scrupulously fashionable walking attire.

A friendly word and light-hearted smile also met Zoë as soon as she entered the house; for Lise, the maid-of-all-work, peered out of the kitchen to greet the English demoiselle, as she greeted everyone else, with the customary Bon jour. Lise, an ugly little peasant girl, yet clever in all domestic matters, and never under any circumstances depressed or ill-tempered, liked to have Zoë in the house. There was more going on when two people lived together than when one lived alone, and Lise adored variety.

The class-rooms consisted of three large rooms, leading one into the other, and at

the farther end were two pretty little salons, each sleeping and sitting-room in one; in the first of these she found her friend, Mademoiselle Huberte, the directress of the school, busied before the glass, in that all-important act of a Frenchwoman's life—namely, trying on a new bonnet. She was a handsome woman, with good features, abundant hair of glossy black, and a fine figure, but being thirty-five, and without fortune, had long sighed over romance as a witchery banished from her own existence for ever. For the most part, she bore her solitary lot magnanimously, throwing heart and soul into the daily work of teaching which she did so well. But there were moments, and the possession of a new bonnet was one, when a transient youthfulness and a transient coquetry took possession of her; when she looked in the glass, and triumphing in the unwonted brightness of her eyes, and

the added bloom on her cheeks, said to herself that she was young still.

"Does not the bonnet marvellously become me, dear friend?" she said, turning round to Zoë with the vanity of a little girl dressed in bridal white for the ceremony of her first communion. "Am I not handsome in it?"

"It is very pretty, and suits you admirably," Zoë answered, trying to interest herself in details.

"How cold you Englishwomen are! Will nothing send you into raptures?" asked Huberte, who had herself a reputation for coldness among her sex, and who was never enthusiastic now-a-days except when a new bonnet suited her taste, or a young pupil satisfactorily passed her examination for the teacher's diploma.

Zoë was delighted at her friend's gaiety, and now said a dozen flattering things about

the bonnet. Every part of it was examined as carefully as if it were a sample of school needlework about to be sent to a public exhibition. Then Lise summoned them to dinner, and the new treasure was consigned no less carefully to its box than if it were an infant to its cradle.

When there seemed nothing more to say about this achievement of millinery, Huberte asked if Zoë had seen Monsieur Delmar that afternoon. Zoë, with some reserve, answered the question. For many reasons she preferred not to talk, even to her most intimate friend, of the monk just yet.

"As he is your relation, and as you are English, you can take country walks together without creating scandal," Huberte said, after a long pause. "But there is one point on which, if I were you, for my own peace of mind, I would have a clear understanding.

You ought to know whether he is married or a bachelor."

Zoë reflected before making answer. She did not wish to appear hard upon an interference evidently so well meant; but how, without causing soreness, if not vexation, could she make plain her meaning?

"What right have I to pry into his private affairs, and what difference could such knowledge make? I promise you, Huberte, never to let this intimacy with my cousin compromise either you or me."

"And I know you will keep your promise. I was not thinking of myself when I spoke, nor of you simply as my fellow-teacher, and the sharer of my home," said Huberte, with warmth. "It seems to me there is another kind of danger."

Quite prepared for what was to follow, Zoë met her friend's look frankly and expectantly.

"And far greater than the rest," Huberte continued, a slight flush mounting to her olive cheeks. "Perhaps I am not so many years your elder that I ought to talk to you on these subjects, but"—and here she blushed a deeper rose still, and looked into her plate—"I am not without experience in matters of the heart, and I have always found that so-called friendships between men and women end in sentiment of another kind."

"In France it may be so, but in England no," Zoë answered, speaking just as straightforwardly and practically as if the topic selected for discussion were cookery or dressmaking. "I suppose that among my country-people falling in love, so-called, is much rarer than with you. Anyhow, very warm friendships exist to my certain knowledge between the two sexes, and no harm comes of them."

"You are a strange people," Huberte said—"I have always heard so, and now I believe it. Do you mean to tell me," and here she fixed her large dark eyes penetratingly on the English girl's fair face—"do you mean to tell me that you will meet Monsieur Delmar to-morrow without any fluttering of the heart; that when you two are walking arm-in-arm along lonely country lanes, you will feel no more emotion than if it were I who were beside you; that you are not already looking forward to this holiday together with indescribable pleasure or excitement? Ah! now your blush betrays you!"

Again Zoë hesitated before making a reply. She was not given to impetuous speeches, least of all when she felt herself aggrieved or wounded. To flame out into red-hot looks, or melt suddenly into pas-

sionate tears, might be the true woman's way to behave under such circumstances, but it was not Zoë's.

"How can I make myself understood, when you have never lived in England, and cannot judge of my motives and actions by the proper standard—that is to say, by the English standard?" Here she could not help showing a touch of temper, and went on speaking in a more rapid, more incisive tone—"It is not in our insular temperament always to be thinking of sentiment, or love, for that is what you mean. I do not say that it makes us better or worse as a people, but so it is; we are more matter-of-fact, less impressionable, less given to losing our heads about romance. When I blushed just now, it was at your imputations. I like my cousin's society. Why should I give up an inter-

course so agreeable to me, just because in France it is not the fashion to tolerate friendship between our sex and the other? There, Huberte, you have the whole truth, and if you are vexed with me, it is your own fault as well as mine."

Huberte shook her head a little maliciously. She had the highest opinion of English integrity and sobriety of conduct, though, except in the person of her friend Zoë, she loved the cold insular nation little; but nothing that Zoë could say on this point carried any convincingness with it. Zoë, like herself, was a mere woman; there might be many nations—there were only two sexes in the world.

She smiled, therefore, not in the least affronted, only amused at the earnestness of Zoë's protestations, and only seeing in them one reason the more for her own surmises on the subject.

"You must see," Zoë went on, "how differently I should behave, if, indeed, you were right and I was wrong, and this friendship with Mr. Delmar had a suspicion of the danger you speak of. I have my bread to earn; you are my best friend; am I so perverse and so foolish as to risk my own chances of a livelihood and your good name for the sake of a temporary acquaintance? Mr. Delmar will not stay here much longer."

"Will he not really?" Huberte asked at last, struck by the unmoved way in which Zoë stated the fact.

"He is making an archæological tour throughout France and will leaves Les Ponts as soon as he has completed his observations," Zoë answered.

"Well, enjoy your walks with him whilst you may. I hope that you will do nothing to harm me, and if you are less prudent

regarding yourself, remember that I have warned you," Huberte said, now herself again; adding, in a voice of sudden self-congratulation—"Ah! as the gas is lighted, let us see the effect of the bonnet by candle-light."

The two friends retired early, for by six o'clock every morning they were up and stirring, by seven Lise brought in their little trays of fragrant coffee and roll, and by eight the duties of the day had begun in earnest. Like everyone else in France they worked hard, and perhaps with fewer enjoyments than fall to the lot of most. When the weekly half holiday of Thursday came, a walk into the Jardin des Plantes to hear the band play, or a pic-nic got up among half a dozen pupils or fellow-teachers, formed their sole recreation. Sundays were enjoyed in the same quiet way, Huberte often

taking Zoë with her to breakfast or dine with her relations, good, friendly, homely folks, with young children, pet birds, kittens, and other domesticities. In winter time, an occasional visit to the opera or concert-room made another diversion; there would also be tea-drinkings at friends' houses to celebrate the New Year, and perhaps a little musical party or conversazione, the latter after provincial fashion of the tamest kind, the men standing in one row, and discussing politics, the ladies sitting in another, timidly talking about children and dress. Little else had ever happened to break the smooth routine of their working life till Zoë's acquaintance with Delmar, an event almost as interesting to Huberte as to Zoë herself. It afforded a new topic of conversation, matter for more animated discussion; was like a novel, indeed, to the two women, both too hard-

worked to read novels except in the longest holiday of the year, both anxious to brighten each other's life to the utmost of their ability, and both, like the rest of their sex, naturally inclined to poetise the prose of the work-a-day world.

Zoë slept the sleep of health, innocence, and well-earned repose, and waked always to the mischievous tapping and twittering of her tame sparrows. Like spoiled children, who think themselves of more importance than the rest of the world, these little creatures soon after dawn would begin their daily task of arousing the household. The roof-tops were alive with them, and each particular window had its pensioners, no more allowing themselves to be forgotten than if they were veritable sons and daughters of the house. Zoë's pets were especially exacting and vivacious, shyly hopping

away at the slightest movement within, yet if no crumbs were forthcoming, tapping and twittering the next moment more impatiently than before. Seldom, indeed, did she forget them, or if she did, on the morrow came more bread than usual, and endearing cries of apology from little Lise.

"Ah! mademoiselle, mademoiselle," she said, reproachfully, when on this particular morning she brought in Zoë's breakfast, "there are two days gone by, and no notice taken of your poor little birds! Does it not pierce your heart to hear them cry?"

Zoë coloured under the well merited reproach, and began at once feeding her pets; looking, as she stood by the open window in her spotless white morning gown, so pure, so sweet, so full of tenderness that she must have disarmed a far bitterer resent-

ment than could lodge in the tiny breast of a sparrow. But why had she forgotten them? She blamed herself without knowing the cause of her remissness.

CHAPTER III.

BLACKBERRYING.

THE sparrows were not forgotten next morning, although Zoë woke up with a mind brimful of happy thoughts. They seemed to fill her whole being, just as the warm sunshine of this unclouded, almost tropical September day flooded her dainty little room from end to end. Like all lovely-natured women, she adored wild flowers, the out-door singing of birds, the seeking for fairy nooks in woodland places, and other delights of Nature. How, indeed, could many of her sex exist without this innocent passion? In sorrow,

it consoles them; in loneliness, it keeps them company; in hours of ill-requited toil and unshared despondency, it gives them hope and a sense of almost undying youthfulness. None, perhaps, but the loveless, the childless, the undowered, fully understand what a love of birds and flowers means. Zoë, though young still, and for the best part content with her life, understood it well.

Such a rejoicing in natural beauty and intense appreciation of freedom, leisure from task-work, liberty to run hither and thither in the breezy open, permission to enjoy to the utmost, quite sufficiently explained her rapture at the prospect of such an excursion, without any additional motive; and even Huberte, who was also invited to spend that afternoon in the country, forbore more raillery about Delmar. When they met at their eleven o'clock breakfast, both dressed in pretty summer

gowns and white straw hats, nothing was said about the last night's conversation. The weather was perfect; they had an extra holiday in honour of some blessed public event, they were free of school and school duties till sunset. Huberte was in as high spirits as her friend, and when she saw how naturally and persistently Zoë dwelt on the pleasures of gathering blackberries and wild flowers, and how utterly Delmar seemed ignored, she set down such a way of looking at things as but another piece of insular eccentricity, and determined not to disquiet herself any more about this new acquaintance. Zoë's cold northern temperament would, doubtless, save her from harm, and, most likely, Delmar partook of the same unimpressionable character.

Whilst Zoë did certainly think much more of the green fields and hedges than of Delmar just then, they would very likely

have lost some charm, had she suddenly discovered that she must enjoy them alone. The anticipation of sharing an infinity of exquisite pleasures with one so subtly alive to every kind of beauty, and so intuitively possessed of the poetic faculty of discovering and enlarging it, as Delmar, could but heighten all other feelings. No wonder, therefore, that she smiled to herself as she took her short, hot walk to the booking place of the omnibus. The meridian heat and the glare of the streets were almost unbearable, dazzling white walls and burning blue sky making the eyes ache and the brain dull; but Zoë, sheltered by her large white cotton umbrella, and clad in cool summer garments, tripped along, unconscious of the blaze around and above her, and the almost red-hot pavement under her feet.

In a few minutes she reached the

meeting-place where he awaited her, also wearing the same holiday look in his face and dressed in light clothing.

"How naughty of you to forget the promised basket!" he said, gaily; "but I took the precaution to bring one myself. Nay, do not touch it, it is full, and its contents are to remain mysterious for the present."

Then he helped her into the omnibus and took a seat by her side. There were others evidently bent on the same happy errand as themselves—a middle-aged daughter and her lively old mother, both provided with baskets, and childishly garrulous about the woodland pleasures to come; a young officer, his wife, nursemaid, and their children; and others. When every place was filled, the heavy old vehicle set off at a deceptively jaunty pace, traversed half a dozen bridges, now almost desert-

ed on account of the burning heat, then, dropping passengers as it went, crawled slowly along a mile and half of straight, dusty, poplar-bordered boulevard. By the time Zoë and Delmar reached the stopping-place everyone else had alighted, and the clearer atmosphere and fresher breeze betokened the nearness of fields and meadows. But they were as yet in the suburbs, and had to walk further on before reaching the real, unmistakably cock-crowing country.

They strolled along, each shaded by a huge umbrella, each condemned to silence by the necessity of keeping under the shadow of the hedge, the tiny green path not admitting of two. By-and-by, they came to a bit of open heath or common, at the farther end of which stood a farm-house; leading the way, he guided her past the homestead, and along a narrow winding

lane, till all on a sudden they found themselves in the loveliest little glade ever imagined, a lawn of veriest fairy green, hedged in by hawthorn, birch, and willow, save where sunny openings showed sister glades beyond. There were flowers growing here and there, and large luscious blackberries in distracting abundance on every side; wrens and robins piped in the hedges, and rustic sounds came from the farmyard now hidden by the trees—the sawing of timber, the cackling of hens, the barking of shepherd dogs—otherwise all was still; and what an exquisite, intoxicating stillness!

He found a little green seat close under the hedge for his companion, then, taking off his hat, and setting down basket and umbrella, stretched himself at full length on the turf, a little way off. For a minute or two both silently drank in the delicious quietude and enticing beauty of the place.

At last Zoë said, rather timidly, for she hardly knew if she ought to disturb his rapt enjoyment,

"Tell me, is this at all like America?"

"Nothing could be less like, although green grass, and the wind rippling it, and the fluttering of little birds among the boughs, and the tenderness of the blue heavens—these are the same all the world over. But we have our Indian summer, which is unknown in France, a golden haze enveloping the crimson and orange woods, a bursting of nature into last, most glorious flower, a passionate awaking before the wintry sleep of earth and sky. No, Zoë, autumn in my own country is far more splendid than anything you know of here. Ah! you must see America some day."

She was silent, hoping that he would go on without any remark. She liked to listen so much better than to talk, for at least the

listener cannot blunder, and the unreflecting mention of America at once brought back Huberte's absurd yet irritating speeches.

"I am here rather reminded of Germany, and of my student days in dear, classic little Weimar," Delmar went on. "I used to find just such nooks and corners as these, and lying on my back, as I lie now, wrote dozens of songs and sonnets long since consigned to the flames. But they were happy days! These country walks with you remind me of them."

Nothing pleased Zoë better than to hear his redundant memories of mixed, far-reaching experiences. He was so much wiser, so much more versed in men and things than herself. But Delmar to-day seemed much more inclined to let loose the reins of his fancy, and poetise about books, nature, and the unseen world of thought. His mind was a treasure-house filled to the brim with

the choicely garnered results of genius and science, and without seeming to talk much, his listener must have been cold indeed who should come away undelighted and uninstructed. Now he recited with charming elocution some apt lines of a favourite poet; now he criticised this author or that; one moment he told a story, the next he described some novel adventure. Or Zoë would modestly ask him a pertinent question about subjects he had made peculiarly his own, when he would explain away her difficulties and enlighten her ignorance, as patiently as if he were teaching a child.

Much as Delmar liked Zoë's society—her face, her voice, her manner, even the dress she wore being agreeable to him—he did not notice how silent she was, compared with himself.

And again and again their minds reverted joyously to the captivating world about

them. After all, the real inspiration of their happy mood lay here. The exquisite atmosphere, the superb sky, the abundance of greenery, interpenetrated with the ambered September sunshine, the solitude only broken by low notes of birds, made up a sum total of childishly innocent, yet intense enjoyment, they could not have explained to each other had they tried, and at times quite apart from personal feeling.

"Come," he said, when they had long rested thus, Zoë sitting upright on her moss-covered cushion, her hands clasped about her knees, her face expressive of unalloyed contentment; Delmar stretched at full length on the smooth turf below the bank, his arms supporting his upturned head. "Let us not be lavish of our time here; there are other favourite nooks of mine you must see—that is to say, if you are not tired."

"Oh, no," Zoë answered, rising, content to go or stay; could one be better than the other? "I am not tired indeed. I can walk a long way still."

They started off walking slowly, he mindful at every moment of her pleasure in little things, gathering the ripest blackberries for her refreshment, stopping to tell her what bird was singing in the hawthorn bush here, plucking a spray of Traveller's Joy there.

"Is it possible that you have already spent two years in Les Ponts, and have never yet found out these glades?" he asked, as he led the way through a second green lane into a second little lawny space, if possible, sunnier, more poetic, more rural than the first. "What have you done with your holidays all this time?"

"I have had no one enterprising enough to accompany me so far before. Huberte

is a poor walker, and whenever we spend a day in the country, it means sitting in people's gardens. That is dull."

"Your life is a hard one, my poor cousin Zoë. I wish you were rich enough to give up the drudgery of teaching, and follow the bent of your own inclination."

"An unwise wish! Why is it harder for me to have to earn my bread than for others—Huberte, for instance? And I follow the bent of my inclinations sometimes; I am doing it now."

"This shall not be the last time you get a taste of the country. We will have many a holiday ramble before winter sets in. But look how daintily the little landscape unfolds itself!—glade upon glade of tenderest green, one miniature avenue after another, and nothing beyond or around but the green and the blue. Is it not a fantastic bit of country? And how solitary! Who

could suppose that we were within a child's walk of a large city?"

"Who, indeed!" cried Zoë, enraptured. "How clever of you to have made such a discovery!"

"I hate the life of towns," he went on, "and only really live when I am out of doors amid trees and fields." Then they entered yet another little emerald space, with goldenest openings into the purple distance, and all round loveliest play of light and shadow made by the arching trees. "Have you not discovered that I am somewhat of a misanthrope, my cousin Zoë? Otherwise, how should you account for the fact that, in the midst of these multitudes, I live, but for you and my young friend, Father Gabriel—as he calls himself, Brother Gabriel as I call him—utterly and entirely alone?"

"And what a strange acquaintance is that

last one!" Zoë said, smiling, and turning towards him with much womanly inquisitiveness. "Do you see much of each other?"

"As much as the rules of his order permit. I have, as you doubtless know, scant liking for the monastic system or for his theology, as a whole. It is the man and not the monk I care about. I feel a tender affection for him, much as if he were a younger brother. The transparency of his character, his boyish purity and innocence of mind, his incomparable ingenuousness have quite captivated me, doubtless because they are so rare. Can you understand my meaning?"

"I think I can. I like your monk, too, when he does not talk of the vindictive anger of God, that is to say, when I forget his calling," Zoë said.

"Ah! I also am too often and too pain-

fully reminded of the gulf between us in matters of thought and belief; yet he is so habitually gay—nay, in a state of ecstasy, that it is easy to see how completely he shuts his eyes to their darker side. And what cruelty to undeceive him!"

"Why should he be undeceived if he is innocent-minded and happy? Let him be," Zoë put in, very seriously.

"Have no fear. I always avoid theology as much as possible, and Father Gabriel is a match for me or any other adversary, I assure you. You have not yet heard him argue," Delmar answered, laughing. "But whether he talks or whether he is silent—which in company is seldom—he is quite charming, as you will find out when you know him better. Suppose we get down here, and make our collation under this sheltering oak?"

Zoë opened her eyes inquiringly, but in

silence, and with a mysterious air, he motioned her to a seat on the turf. Then kneeling down, he very deftly spread out the contents of his basket on a clean napkin —a bunch of ripest purple grapes, peaches crimsoned with the warm suns of this western coast, a little loaf of finest flour, lastly, a silver flagon filled with the pleasant light wine of the country, and a tiny drinking cup. Zoë watched these proceedings, looking childishly eager and grateful.

"What a delicious banquet! What made you think of it?" she cried, adding, "And I am really hungry, though I did not know it till now."

"I thought of it because I have learned by experience that human beings get all the hungrier for being happy," Delmar answered, smiling approvingly; then he helped her to the larger portion of the spoil, compelling her to give way with playful

insistence, and lastly, sat down beside her, spread his handkerchief on his knees, and began to eat his share.

"Drink, Zoë," he said, after a time, "I will drink to you; but first you must drink to me, and with what remains of our wine, I will fill a bumper to the health of our common friend, Father Gabriel."

He gaily filled the little silver drinking cup to the brim, and offered it to her. Zoë smiled frankly, looked straight into his kindly eyes, and said, in a voice naturally joyous as his own,

"My love to you, cousin Lionel."

"And mine to my cousin Zoë, and health and happiness to us both, and to our friend."

The little banquet did not last long; but when it was finished, an indolent mood stole over both. It was so pleasant where they were that they had no wish to stir,

and the deepening gold and lengthening shadows of the waning afternoon could not be seen to better advantage further on. Moreover, Delmar and his companion recognised in each other just that rare and transient mood of matchless contentment dually shared which we experience, perhaps, once a year, or once a life-time. In such moments we dread lest the veriest trifle, a carelessly dropped word, a passing footfall, a falling leaf, should break a spell so strong, yet hard to define.

The two friends, not moving an inch, speaking at intervals, and on indifferent topics only, were in the frame of mind which renders the mere notion of change unsupportable. They stayed on and on, till the golden glow had vanished from their little glade, the slanting sun flamed fiercely on the opposite birch-trees, and the sudden coolness and greyness betokened the near

approach of night. The day was gone, and, as it seemed, in a moment.

"We must go now," Zoë said, rising hastily. "We should have gone before. It is already evening."

"Yes," he replied, as regretfully, but without that womanly little sigh. "There is no delicious twilight here as in your native England. The day vanishes, and night at once takes it place."

Without a word more they set off at a rapid pace, still talking, but with words as changed as light from dark. Like children, they were loth to cast aside the gear of holiday thoughts, and clothe their minds in every-day dress. To-morrow she must resume the routine of school-work, and Delmar, the well-beloved, yet monotonous labours of his calling. To-morrow would not be to-day—that was all the difference.

They quitted their little enchanted world

of greenery and solitude hastily, and when once more seated in the omnibus, leaned back, both silent and absorbed in far-wandering thoughts.

CHAPTER IV.

INTERWEAVING THREADS.

DELMAR had been led to act this particular part towards Zoë simply from a wish to make her happy. He yearned to brighten an existence which, from a man's point of view, seemed insupportable. He possessed in a large degree the old-fashioned feeling of chivalrousness, and it seemed to him monstrous that Zoë, or any other sweet woman, should have to fight the battle of life unaided and alone. No man need be lonely unless he chooses, and he was rather a misanthrope; but he knew that there were a hundred reasons why Zoë might wish to

have him for a friend. He had become really interested in her, not as a kinswoman, exiled by cruel necessity from her native land, and a feeble girl, toiling bravely for a precarious livelihood, but as a certain gracious personage, of whom there was no duplicate in the wide world. He was far from rich, and riches, indeed, would have furthered his purpose little, as Zoë was very proud; but he had learning, leisure, and much kindliness of disposition. He could therefore offer her a little amusement and instruction, and such innocent gratification as country walks. In fact, he could give her what every human being needs, namely, a life outside that of every-day duties and commonness. Very much the same feeling entered into his liking for the young monk. Delmar had no need of Father Gabriel, but the latter really needed Delmar. When once, therefore, the two men were on

friendly terms, the elder was always pondering on what might or might not be profitable to the younger. Father Gabriel was a monk—the worse for him!—and towards no other calling could the other have felt so unsympathetic, and even uncompromisingly hostile. But that fact being accepted, there was an end of the matter. It could not be altered, and although mingled with disapproval and commiseration, this first liking soon developed into brotherly affection.

Father Gabriel, indeed, on first being sent to the Franciscan community at the French city of Les Ponts to teach philosophy, had felt a little pardonable home-sickness during the early weeks of exile. Delmar's was the first English-speaking voice that greeted him in his new home, and for that reason, before others, the monk loved to have him for a friend. As yet the only

language he could speak fluently beside his own was Latin, so that all conversation with his fellow-monks had to be carried on in the latter language, an undoubted hindrance to intimacy. Among these, moreover, all of them foreigners, he had found no nature so endearing to him as Delmar's. Putting theology out of the question, which, for the most part, they did by mutual consent, the two always found matter for earnest, refreshing talk; and if Delmar had more to teach, he had also something to learn.

Then it came about that these three were brought together—first, by virtue of their English speech; and secondly, because of a natural liking, that inexplicable convergence to a common centre—that mysterious attraction of one human being towards another called elective affinity, personal fascination, what we will; and thirdly, there was, at least, on Delmar's side, the sense of help-

fulness. He was, after all, a man of the world, enriched by the kind of experiences Zoë and Father Gabriel could never possess —she by reason of her sex, the monk of his calling. Thus it came about that to Delmar was accorded the leadership in the triple friendship. He did not care much about personal influence, but he did care very much about being useful to his friends. Is not this, indeed, the meaning of friendship, the best part of which is not in using, but in being used?

Delmar found his outer life, and consequently himself, much more interesting since his solitude had been thus broken upon. Hardly a day passed now without a glimpse, if nothing more, of Zoë or Father Gabriel, and the latter especially was eager almost to enthusiasm about this new friendship.

There were, of course, limits to his inter-

course with the outer world. Even the Thursday's half-holiday was often appropriated to religious feasts or observances; Delmar's visits to the monastery, rather regulated by custom than law, were few and far between; whilst another meeting with Zoë seemed entirely problematical. Still to have made such an acquaintance was something. Zoë was a pleasant variation on the feminine theme most familiar to him—namely, that to be learned only in the convent walls. He was in the habit of seeing and conversing with the Mother Superiors of this retreat and that, sometimes even with some pale, meek-faced girl, behind the grating, who had taken the three perpetual vows; that was all. His only friend of the other sex here was the elderly, good-natured, ill-educated, and extremely devout wife of a South American friend of Irish extraction.

As there are no statutes forbidding monks to make morning calls, like ordinary worldlings, Father Gabriel occasionally visited her, and had a little common-place talk in her handsome drawing-room; but this was an inquisitiveness that had no bearing whatever upon his inner life. With Zoë he felt that it was not so, and that she could teach him the meaning of that sweet, mysterious, thrice accursed, thrice blessed thing—a woman!

"Do you remember your mother?" he asked of Delmar one day, when the two sat together in friendliest talk, a bottle of light wine and two glasses on the table, and a cigar in the hand of each. The question was put quite unemotionally, without a tender dropping of the voice even, rather with downright curiosity.

"My mother, my dear mother!" Delmar cried, laying his cigar on his knee, his pale

face lighting up with a wonderful expression of love and reverence. "I do, indeed, and it is the purest recollection of my life."

"I have never known what it is to have a mother's love, or that of any woman," the young man said, seriously, yet hardly moved. "I was brought up almost from my infancy by good, kind, devoted men, who made my childhood so happy that I could not miss what others enjoy. But tell me, does not your cousin Zoë remind you of your mother—was she not like her?"

The other smiled—nay, laughed in the midst of his grave thoughts, so artless, so unexpected, absurd even seemed the question. He was middle-aged, and his mother had reached the allotted three score and ten before going the ways of all.

"No," he replied, quickly recovering countenance. "My dear mother was quite

an old lady when I had the misfortune to lose her, and a most beautiful old lady, too, but as unlike Zoë as can well be. She was twenty-six when I was born—about Zoë's age now, and I was exactly forty-two when she died a little more than two years ago. The last time I saw her—dear angel!—five years before her death, she was a lovely picture of old age, with abundance of soft, silvery hair, the most delicate features imaginable, and a tint of rose still in her dear old cheeks. Zoë is charming to look upon, and my mother was a beauty in her time, but the two being blonde and brunette are not to be compared."

"Your cousin has sweet eyes. I should have loved a mother with such eyes," Father Gabriel said, in a frank, boyishly outspoken way, adding, "She is an angel, I am sure, if, indeed, there are good women in the world!"

Again that difficultly-restrained, half ironical, half amused smile rose to Delmar's lips and rippled his dark eyes.

"I do not quite understand your question. In what sense do you mean the word good," he asked—"morally, theologically, practically?"

This time the monk coloured, and his candid blue eyes fell upon the penetrating, though kindly gaze now fixed upon him.

"I ask your pardon for an apparent indiscretion. I had no right to link the name of your friend and kinswoman to a generalization, apparently so harsh. But you must know—and herein I speak unreservedly to you as brother to brother and man to man, not as monk to layman and recluse to one living in the world—our monastic system and theology generally, naturally inculcate the profoundest distrust of the weaker sex.

We know that there are saintly women within the convent walls, angels of purity devoted to works of faith and charity, and we also believe that there are models of female virtue outside the Church—devoted mothers, admirable wives, pious maidens. Surely these exceptions are rare? Otherwise, is not all tradition, all poetry a continued lying from beginning to end? Is not beauty, instead of being a snare from the days of Eve until now, a trifle, a toy, a nothing?"

"You are not looking at the matter in the right light," Delmar said, hardly knowing whether to turn his friend's propositions into reproach or ridicule. "You argue as you might have done had you lived in the dark ages, when religion and the fear of hell were the only bit and bridle curbing the evil inclinations of humanity. All this is changed, as you would discern if you lived in the world. No, my dear friend, excuse me for saying

so, but when you shut yourself up in a monastery, and seek for knowledge of the human heart in books, and in the solitude of your cell only, you are but as one who pours water through a sieve, and perpetually rolls a stone up the mountain side."

"That is plain speaking," answered the monk, not at all displeased, but rather glad to have a way opened for further discussion. "I do not, of course, agree with you. I will, on the contrary, take steps to convince you of your error. Do you happen to be acquainted with the writings of the Fathers of the Church? No! Then by all means have recourse to them, for you would find in St. Augustine, St. Jerome, and St. Basil, for instance, the profoundest knowledge of the human heart, the subtlest insight into the ways of men. Must we not believe that an almost prophetic spirit possesses such men as these, enabling them to

discern what is hidden to grosser minds, to penetrate into mysteries clouded to other eyes? In the serene calm and unbroken quiet of the cloister, believe me, rather than in the turmoil and distraction of the world, my friend, do we see things not as they seem, but as they are."

Delmar shook his head. The other went on, with that ecstatic earnestness, accompanied by lively gesticulation, and upward turning of the eyes, as inseparable from a Franciscan orator as the tonsured crown or brown robe—

"How should it be otherwise? See how ever readily my unfettered mind turns to thought and contemplation!—how easy it is for me to lose myself in the transparent philosophy of the great Angelical, and the meditations of St. Augustine! Were I living in the world, a thousand obstructions would occur at every moment. I should not have

a single hour of the day without its hindrance. I discover, and too often, a cloud upon your brow, a wandering in your thoughts that betoken a mind troubled and ill at ease."

"You lose sight of the fact that I am old and you are young," Delmar said, rising and filling his friend's glass. "This wine is harmless as water, and I know that you are permitted to take a little wine for your stomach's sake."

The monk smiled, and did not refuse the proffered hospitality, made all the more grateful by the afternoon's heat. Seeing that Delmar disapproved of any allusion to his looks, he now changed the subject, and asked him what he thought of public affairs.

"Ah! I confess the situation in France is too difficult for me to hazard an opinion. But you shall have my newspapers, English

and French, if you like, and judge for yourself."

"I accept your offer most readily," the young man said, consigning the packet to some mysterious receptacle in his brown garment, at the same time bringing forward a small book, which he now handed to Delmar with some diffidence. "May I charge you with this for Miss Delmar?" he asked. "It is a little biography of St. Francis, and cannot fail to interest her. She can keep it as long as she likes."

"By all means. Ah!" Delmar said, smiling, "we shall end by trying to convert each other, I see!"

The young monk smiled incredulously.

"You are jesting," he said. "Try to convert me, if you please. Have no fear that I shall turn the proselyte. There is a fitness of things which we monks, above all men, are bound to respect, and I am the

last person in the world to enter your doors under false pretences. No, my good sir, as fellow-countrymen, exiled in a foreign land, let us seek to profit each other in so far as we are able, but let us keep within the limits of mutual forbearance and inclination. How, indeed, is any intercourse possible upon another basis?"

"Nay, I did but jest. We are all best left alone," the other replied. Then they shook hands and separated, the young Franciscan walking home with a beaming face.

During that afternoon's conversation, which had lasted from two till five o'clock, much new light had been thrown upon subjects then uppermost in his mind. They had discussed many interesting points—philosophical, archæological, literary; and looking back upon the three hours' unflagging talk, Father Gabriel congratulated himself upon having such a disputant—above all,

such a listener. For Delmar had liberally dilated, but still more liberally listened, and it is especially a generous hearing that the young aspirant to learning and eloquence needs. Father Gabriel, already learned, though only in his twenty-fourth year, knew well enough that it is useless to accumulate knowledge without the power of applying it, and esteemed it no small privilege to have so ready and conscientious an auditor as Delmar, who never listened apathetically or by halves, but kept himself ever on the watch for a flaw in his friend's argument, or an open point for discussion. The young monk aspired to nothing less than the summit of scholarship and oratory, and felt no kind of scruple, therefore, about reaping all possible benefit from the acquaintance, fast ripening into a friendship, with a Protestant, a Radical in politics, and, for aught he knew, a Freethinker

in spiritual matters. All means are serviceable to good ends, and whilst intellectually enriching himself, was he not being prepared to serve the Church and his community all the better?

Thus, indeed, he reasoned, and thus would have reasoned his spiritual advisers, had he laid the matter before them. The Church in the world, and the world in the Church!—by such perpetual translation of mundane things into heavenly places, such cleansing of impure channels by the overflow of divine springs alone, can the Church be maintained in all its might and integrity.

CHAPTER V.

ANGELS AND DEMONS.

IT was not likely that Zoë could long withhold from her friend the story of her new acquaintance, which, although at present limited to one brief interview, yet offered the liveliest interest to both. Huberte, a very Diana of severity in relation to the other sex—who even deemed it advisable to receive no staid professors, or grey-haired fathers of pupils, unless kept in countenance by a female relation, who would have resented a compliment or extra piece of courtesy from the meekest of these—was yet, at heart, as romantic as the lightest-

minded of her sisters. When Zoë, therefore, who was much the most serious of the two, just told her in straightforward terms what had happened, Huberte's imagination soon busied itself with all manner of conjectures. Did Zoë know anything of this man's history? Whence had he come? What had induced him to enter the cloister? and so on.

A Catholic by birth and by outward observance, but a Protestant, or even a sceptic on many points, at heart, Huberte could interest herself in such a question without any kind of religious scruple. To her mind monasteries, convents, monks, and nuns, were alike anachronisms and anomalies, no more at one with the age in which we live than would be the restoration of the order of Knights Templars or the Inquisition; the gorgeous ceremonials of the Church were robbed of solemnity and

grandeur, in her eyes, by their daily occurrence; the cloistered life of both sexes was divested of reverence, from undue familiarity with its inrooted weakness as a system. The meek-faced sisters and down-looking brothers she encountered in the streets were not, to her thinking, holy men and women, who had entered upon their unnatural career from the highest motives, but rather erring mortals, whom chance, caprice, or too often common frailty have forced into this so-called abode of resignation and piety. Father Gabriel, then, was not interesting in her eyes as a monk and a recluse, simply as a human being and a man—a certain entity made up of such-and-such qualities and graces. Her interest, be it understood, was of the most harmless nature. She hardly cared to see him; she only wanted to know all that might be known about him, just as the rest

of the world likes to hear the veriest trifle concerning this famous personage or that, be it poet, painter, explorer, or any other who has relieved life of its commonness and worldliness.

"It is strange," she said to Zoë one Sunday afternoon, when the two were returning from an afternoon visit in the country. "We have neither of us father nor mother, sister nor brother. My nearest relation is cousin Raoul, who is kind, indeed, as a brother, and whose children regard me as their aunt. You have no one, you see, but even more distant relations than these. No wonder that we so cling to our friends! But two women—even when closest friends—cannot be to each other what men and women are. I am now thinking of brothers and sisters only. I find a difference even with my cousin Raoul. He often teases and irritates me, yet he

inspires me with courage, and helps me in practical difficulties. In fact, he is a support. Take an example. We are both tired now, and would like nothing better than to rest awhile; but to-day being Sunday, every wayside seat is full, and we dare not seek repose elsewhere. Now, if Raoul were with us, he would find a dozen resting places."

Zoë smiled at this half-simulated helplessness which Huberte, as capable of taking care of herself as could well be, would habitually affect. Weakness in her eyes, whether exhibited by screaming at a mouse, or half fainting at an unexpected opening of the door, was strictly feminine, and of a piece with decorous behaviour and faultless taste in dress. To behave otherwise was masculine, indeed, and offensive to all fastidious-minded people.

"Let us rest a little while in yonder

chapel," said Zoë. "Vespers are long since over, so we shall disturb no one."

Huberte willingly consented. They turned from the dusty, crowded boulevards, ascended a little slope, then entered a small, newly-built chapel, the door of which stood open. It was monotonous within, and disfigured by much cheap tinsel, niched Virgins, the simper on their faces exactly according with their poor finery, wreaths and bouquets of gaudy paper flowers, flaunting banners suspended from the roof, and crude illuminations of texts and mottoes on the white-washed walls. In one corner was a construction of painted wood and cork, imitating the grotto of Notre Dame des Lourdes, the whole being much more adapted to a penny peep-show than a place of worship, yet when lighted up, doubtless proved imposing to the multitude.

There were one or two persons scattered

interest, the other with purely feminine curiosity. When the preparations were complete, and the two monks had retired by the side door through which they had come, Zoë and Huberte also quitted the chapel, both eager to communicate their impressions.

"Alas!" said Zoë, with a voice full of sisterly, almost motherly concern, "I am sure the man we saw with Father Gabriel just now is evil-minded. His face has the look of a serpent in it. How horrible it must be to see such a face every day!"

"There are angels and devils everywhere," Huberte said, coolly. "Your friend Father Gabriel is very handsome. He interests me extremely. What a pity a young man, so charming to look at, should shut himself up in a cloister!"

"Indeed it is," Zoë answered, in the same serious, speculative tones. She was one of

those women who could interest herself in her fellow-creatures as human beings, divesting them of any personality that could possibly affect her own. "I should not be so sorry, could I believe that the monastery is what it professes to be, and monks also what they appear to be to the outer world. Mr. Delmar is a sceptic on these points, and, I fear, has influenced me."

"Oh!" Huberte said, with her inimitable little French shrug of the shoulders, "we are all sceptics now-a-days. Monsieur Delmar goes out with the crowd there. But if you pity the young man so much, try to convert him."

"Heaven forbid! What do I know of his secret heart? He is doubtless profoundly convinced of the sacredness of his calling, and a devout believer besides. But will his enthusiasm for the life he has chosen last?"

"My dear Zoë," Huberte said, still malicious and contradictory, "I am astonished at your innocence in these matters. Do you suppose there is a spark of enthusiasm among those sleek, self-satisfied, sanctimonious Mother Superiors you see so often, still less among the nuns, who are either poor, hysterical creatures, sure to die of consumption before thirty, or, if they have outlived this tendency, settle down into childish, semi-idiotic, meddlesome, egotistic plumpness, to my thinking, disgusting to behold? I was brought up in a convent, you know, my friend, and I know a thing or two. Have you ever seen nuns eat? They are uncommonly fond of a good dinner, I assure you. No, take my word for it. When Father Gabriel reaches middle age, he will be stout, florid, and plethoric like his fellows."

"I pity him all the same," Zoë answered.

"There is an aged priest I often see from my window, hardly able to crawl, who gets out on sunny mornings and takes a little air by the aid of a man-servant almost as decrepit as himself. It is a pitiable sight! The two old men, with their coarse, unsoftened faces, walking side by side without ever exchanging a word!"

"Well," Huberte said, "monks are not like nuns; they, at least, enter upon their career voluntarily and with their eyes open. Priests and monks are but mortal men like the rest, and depend on it, the asceticism they practise has its limits like everything else. They eat, drink, and make merry."

"Surely some are honest and self-sacrificing, and enter the cloister or the priesthood with conscientious motives?"

"How many? If your friend the Franciscan is one, so much the better, or, it may be, the worse for him."

In spite of Huberte's flippancy, which was partly affected and partly sincere, she was just as much interested in the young monk as her friend, only with a difference; whilst Father Gabriel's inner life chiefly awakened Zoë's curiosity, with Huberte it was the contrary. She did not at all care to read his character from its spiritual side, or to know his inner history, past, present, and to come. What she really cared to learn was that every-day chronicle of fact and circumstance, however unimportant, which in this case could not be known. She wanted to change places with Delmar, and to have the young man's confidences poured into her ear. Huberte was admirable in many respects, rigidly conscientious in the fulfilment of duty, proud where pride becomes a woman, but we are not all gifted with an appreciation of the finest fibre of human

character, any more than we can all detect the soul that a musician has put into his harmonies.

Thus, as often mysteriously happens, a web of almost inappreciably fine threads, unimagined regrets, fancies, aspirations, unreciprocated hopes, fears, and sympathies, were cast about the young man's way, netted him in, unknown to himself. How should he know? How can any of us tell when this same invisible, undreamed-of influence goes before us, and follows after, hovering on every side, dealing bale or blessing as the case may be?

Had anyone told Father Gabriel of this feminine talk, treating it as a matter of grave import, or indeed of any import at all, would he not have looked upon the speaker as a maniac? Yet must not those who so strongly interest themselves in us give us

benediction or curses before we die? Who will say No, though the question is one of deepest mystery?

CHAPTER VI.

BEGINNINGS OF A LOVE-STORY.

AFTER this accidental meeting in the chapel of the Franciscan brotherhood, nothing occurred out of the ordinary way for some days. Zoë and Huberte began their usual labours on Monday morning—the former resignedly, nay, cheerfully, yet not without bird-like bursts of impatience now and then; Huberte as mechanically and unemotionally as if she were an automaton wound up for a certain limited number of performances. Zoë was one of those women who have a different carriage, a different tone of voice, a wholly different countenance for

the places, the occupations, and the people she loved. She did not absolutely dislike teaching, and there was something in the outward tranquillity and orderliness of the convent schools that soothed her and appealed to her imagination. The long, well-lighted scrupulously clean corridors; the airy, lofty class-rooms, looking on to pleasant gardens, and only adorned by a carved crucifix, small enshrined Virgin, or patron saint; the soberly-dressed, soft-voiced, noiselessly-moving nuns; the little girls in their uniforms of black and blue in winter, and blue and white, or brown, in summer; the apparent harmony and peace that perpetually dwelt here, made her faintly envy alike Sisters and scholars, despite her inborn Protestantism. She felt, when the convent gates closed upon her, that at least something of the world and its turmoil were here shut out; just as even a philosophic unbeliever will occasionally wistfully regard

the sight of church-goers, or sound of bells calling to prayers on Sunday, so would Zoë crave that unbroken conscientious cheerfulness which seems as much a part of a nun as the garb she wears.

But although thus far in unison with her surroundings, she could not help longing for a little more life, a little more liberty, a little more romance, now and then—longings which Delmar was always ready to gratify, and which were but intensified with every fresh gratification.

During the first few weeks of their acquaintance, an occasional walk in the Jardin des Plantes, a country ramble, or at most an hour's journey down the river with him, had seemed more than enough diversion from the burden of every-day existence; but of late, in spite of renewed effort at self-command, she was constantly wondering why he had not written to propose an-

other little expedition, and so on. Where one delicious half-holiday had contented her before, a dozen would have left her unsatisfied now, and no amount of inward reasoning or self-reproach could mend matters. She did not neglect her work, or go through the daily round with a blank face. Everything had, on the contrary, become much more interesting to her since knowing him. Her own capacities seemed enlarged, her entire personality—entity, being, call it by what name we will—that strange thing known to us as Self appeared newly created, changed into something brighter, more youthful, more animated. Even Huberte would occasionally say to her friend,

"I did not know before, little Englishwoman, that you were the best-looking of us two. How pretty you have grown of late!"

And Delmar, whom Zoë's looks had

charmed always, found himself occasionally thinking—

"Yes, Father Gabriel is right. Zoë is a really beautiful woman. What a thousand pities she has to earn her bread as a teacher!"

So, as always happens, Zoë's outer life acted on the inner, simply because she was being made happy in a new way. She could no more help showing this elation than she could help having eyes of a certain sweet colour, and a mouth with bewitching archness when smiling on those she loved. It had come to this. The days on which she saw him were perfect, of which those preceding and following after were but a feeble reflection.

They could not meet very often. Zoë's time was chiefly taken up with her pupils, Delmar's with his archæological pursuits, and the latter, whether from fastidiousness or a relic of Puritanism, he did not say,

objected to joining the multitude of pleasure-seekers on Sundays. Thus Thursday afternoon, the universal school holiday throughout France, was for the most part the only opportunity of seeing her in the week, and as this was Father Gabriel's time of recreation also, he had to choose between the two. But he could visit the monk in his cell, and he could not visit Zoë in her home, so by far the largest share of his Thursdays fell to her.

Let none accuse Delmar of indiscretion in these endeavours to improve his cousin's lot. He had found her alone, exiled by the dire necessity of earning her bread, living a life of toil, hardly relieved by anything worthy the name of pleasure. She was so much younger, so much worse treated by Fortune, so much feebler than himself, that from the first his heart had

yearned to her with the purest feelings of chivalrous pity.

Whilst as yet but carelessly enjoying these autumnal rambles in her company, he had no idea how much they were becoming to her, how alike looking forward and retrospection heightened them in her imagination, and how, indeed, she was beginning to live upon the joy that grew out of them, her other existence lying remote from the ideal one, as the deep shadow cast by some luminous cloud. He rejoiced in her added bloom, beauty, and vivacity; he congratulated himself upon relieving at least one exquisite nature from the inherent gloom of life; he sunned himself in her eager joyousness, not at all guessing the depth of hidden feeling that lay beneath. He had lived at least one life already, as far as passion went, and in that respect she had not lived at all.

"Zoë," he said, one day, watching her face for the look of pleasure he knew would come, "would it not make you happy to see the sea?"

She did not answer at once, but he saw in her eyes the picture his words had called forth.

"Oh! how could you tell that I love the sea better than anything in the world?" she cried. "It is a part of my youth. When I was a little girl, I used to live near it alone with my mother. My father, you know, died soon after I was born, and the sea seemed our only friend; I was dreaming of it in my sleep only last night!"

"Then your dream shall come true next Thursday," Delmar answered. "You have, luckily, a whole holiday on that day; the weather is sure to be glorious for another fortnight, so let us arrange to meet on the

platform of the new branch railway at ten o'clock precisely."

Zoë consented without a second thought, and was not deterred by Huberte's raillery, nor by the remonstrances that followed.

"Take care, take care," said the monitor, when Thursday came, "Monsieur Delmar, you admit, is excellent company. Is there no danger in having so much of it?"

"Is once a week much?" Zoë replied, not without a shade of impatience. "To me it seems very little."

"Ah!" Huberte added, triumphantly. "Then if, indeed, it is so, I advise you to give up these promenades with your friend altogether. You see, moreover, my dear, it is not yourself, but me you have to think of. Supposing that remarks are made upon this expedition,—that you meet, by chance, parents or friends of our pupils,—what then?"

"I am an Englishwoman, and cannot conform to your straight-laced, foreign etiquette; they should know that. You seem to forget, Huberte, how old we both are," Zoë added, with touching ingenuousness; "I am twenty-six, and Mr. Delmar is forty-two."

"Is that old? Age is nothing in matters of sentiment."

"But there is no question of sentiment; it is a question only of the so-called conventionalities of society, etiquette, and decorum, if you prefer these names," Zoë continued, her heightened colour and increased rapidity of manner indicating just a touch of resentment. "Tell me frankly, Huberte, am I injuring your social position or my own?"

Huberte crimsoned. For the first time during their intimacy and partnership in the material concerns of life, the two friends

found themselves close on the verge, not exactly of a quarrel, but of a serious disagreement.

"I think more of the future than of the past, and I do believe that you will injure our position, if you continue as you have begun. Recollect that we have both our bread to earn, and slander in our case, even light gossip, would be nothing short of ruin."

"I will never ruin my best friend," Zoë answered, still slightly resentful. "Rather than run any risk of doing that, I will leave you. We should always love each other."

Huberte's flush died away, and she looked at her friend in amazement. Had this speech really come from the calm, reserved, proud Englishwoman whom she had hitherto acquitted alike of passion and temper? Tears started to her eyes, for she loved Zoë dearly, and this frank declaration to sacrifice

everything but Delmar's society pained her deeply.

"Let us say no more now," she said, kissing her on the forehead. "Perhaps we have already said too much. Enjoy yourself to-day, at least, my dear, and we can finish our quarrel to-morrow."

Then, with unspoken regret and self-reproach on both sides, they parted, Huberte to spend the day at her cousin's, Zoë to meet Delmar at the railway-station. All traces of the little storm had vanished by the time she reached the meeting place, where he awaited her, like herself in holiday attire and holiday mood. Their eyes dwelt approvingly on each other, so well did Zoë's dress of purest white and little straw hat become her, so much younger and gayer he looked, she thought, in those light-coloured garments, for once, also, not disfigured by the hideous head covering of the

day, but wearing a kind of Tyrolean green travelling hat. She had fastened a little knot of sweet smelling flowers to her girdle, he also carried a rose-bud in his button-hole, a happy English fashion not yet transported to more decorous France, where to wear flowers is the privilege of the young and the light-minded only.

It was the tiniest little railway-station ever seen, a mere hut, standing alone in the midst of suburban fields and gardens, and whilst they waited for the train to start—an engine conveying two carriages only, and on a single line—the thought occurred simultaneously to both—

How lonely we are! What difference would it make to anyone or anything left behind if this little train carried us to the end of the world never to return?

Words, however, are often no index whatever to the matter uppermost in our

minds, for Delmar observed, a moment after,

"We shall have, like Royalty, a whole train to ourselves! The bathing season, I suppose, ends with the opening of the schools."

And she answered, in a matter-of-fact voice,

"Yes, a month ago, I daresay we should have had some difficulty in procuring seats at all."

Then they laughingly looked first into one compartment and then another, finally selecting the best, and comfortably settled themselves for the two hours' journey. One or two peasant folks got in, and a couple of nuns, but that was all. Laden with this small freight the train set off at a snail's pace along the newly-made line, passing for the first hour a flat, fertile, open country, and for the last, wild, unbroken tracts of

marsh, with glimpses of blue sea among the brown, and little in the way of foliage or vegetation to break the prevailing monotony. It seemed to Zoë as if the unspoken thought of her heart was being realised, and they were, indeed, on their way to the world's end. Something of the same kind occurred to Delmar, for he said, in a new voice—a voice as much of a revelation to Zoë as if she had suddenly discovered that his eyes were blue, and not of a dark colour approaching to black—

"Ah! we have arrived. I am very sorry, I wish our journey could have lasted twenty times as long!"

He spoke so naturally that, in spite of the undefined something in the voice that had startled, almost electrified her, she took courage to look at him. But such riddles are human beings to each other that the very next moment she blushed, self-convicted of a folly

in dwelling upon trifles, for he met her glance unsuspectingly, and added, without the slightest shade of embarrassment, with only his old frankly-expressed pleasure in her society,

"It is true. But now look straight before you. That blue line yonder is the Bay of Biscay."

She stood up and gazed out of the window, carelessly gay and eager as a child again. The train now glided into the station. In another minute or two they were exploring the prettiest little sea-port in the world, half Italian, half Oriental, with a tiny enclosed harbour, hemmed in by green, softly-dimpled hills, its sleepy quays bordered with green-shuttered houses in pink and saffron-coloured stucco; cresting these, the ruins of a feudal castle, softened by the hand of time and nature; and beyond all, tawny sails on a warm, indolent southern

sea—a lake of amethyst, unrippled by a breeze.

"That is not like the sea you remember?" asked Delmar, noting the mental comparison in his companion's face.

"No," Zoë answered, with a little look of disenchantment. "What I recollect is a cold grey sky, and a cold grey sea, with long lines of white foam, and angry breakers dashing on the brown sands. And a solemn, deafening roar always."

"Do not suppose, however, that we are to see no waves, only we should surely breakfast before going much farther. To lose any time in-doors is not to be thought of this glorious day, so I will leave you in a little fairy grotto I know of, and return to the town to cater."

They walked on a hundred yards or two, skirting the miniature port, then followed a winding road shaded with trees, that

led down to the sea. Here, low down among the shelving rocks, having an exquisite picture of sea and sky, fishing-boats and green hills, purple and blue, orange and emerald, all clearly cut in the luminous atmosphere, as the pieced jewelry of a mosaic, he found her the coolest, quietest retreat imaginable. She thanked him with a joyous smile, then, turning back to nod to her, he hastily climbed the steep path leading to the town.

As she sat alone in this delicious spot, musical little waves kissing the smooth white sands at her feet, not another sound breaking the stillness, nothing in sight that stirred except the lazy sail of a fishing-boat between the violet and the azure, a mood of perfect happiness stole over her, and she did not want even his presence to disturb it.

Leaning back in a corner of her rocky couch, she sat gazing on the scene, hands

folded placidly on her knees, lips just parted in a rapturous smile, eyes dilated with delight and admiration. How good to be here, to be made so happy, to have a friend like him, to be free from the shadow of the remotest care for a whole day! Yes, thought Zoë, it is perverse and bitter to call existence a burden and a weariness. Nature is good, human nature is beneficent, God permits his creatures still to walk in Paradise without the serpent!

When the quintessence of enjoyment is thus presented to us, it is useless to try to analyze our feelings, and Zoë did not ask herself—why am I so happy to-day? Why do I want nothing, even Delmar's presence? She merely accepted the intoxicating cup held to her lips, and drank the last drop, asking for nothing, not even more.

When he returned, in half an hour's time, comically burdened with marketings, the

spell was of course broken, but she awoke from reverie to find the actual none the less bright and welcome. The sun was now intense, and, glad to be under shelter, he luxuriously leaned back and fanned himself, whilst she set out their breakfast gaily. It was not an epicurean repast, but tempting nevertheless; three or four kinds of shell-fish—in these little sea-side places people would be starved without the abundant supply of so-called *coquillage*—a superb melon, the delicious little ruby-red strawberries of four seasons in plenty, bread and wine; these were the principal dishes, and Zoë thought nothing had ever tasted half so good. Delmar also was in the highest spirits. They talked intimately of their every-day lives, their pursuits, their likes and dislikes, their dreams—of everything, indeed, except the future.

Once he dropped the words, chance-wise,

"When I go away from Les Ponts"—words that made Zoë colour painfully; but that was the only time he referred to his plans during that long day's talk, except to say, which he did brusquely, much as if he and Zoë had known each other all their lives,

"I have been thinking, Zoë, that there is no valid reason why you should not accompany me on the little excursion into the Dolmen region. It will only last three or four days, and would be most interesting and highly instructive. We should see curious old churches and strange costumes of isolated fisher-folk, and as curious a district, historically speaking, as any in France. Why not do it?"

"What would Huberte say?" Zoë answered, glad to have some excuse, feeling just then that, but for Huberte, she should say yes to this or any other proposal he might make; in fact, dreading lest, in spite

of his kindliness, he might urge her to do something foolish.

"Mademoiselle Huberte should go to America," Delmar said, a little petulantly. "There her eyes would be opened to the fact that it is possible for a woman to act like a free, reasonable human being, and take no harm. I hate this French slavishness to opinion, this sentimental prudery. Is it at all likely that I should wish you to do what is wrong?"

And he looked straight into her face with such honest indignation in his eyes and voice that Zoë at once chided herself as a coward for having put forward Huberte's objections instead of her own.

"We know that, but you do not understand how hard it is for women to gain their bread in France without reproach, and how even a worthless piece of gossip is enough to take away our good names. I assure

you, Huberte has reason for her scruples. Were I a rich woman, and able to follow my inclinations, I would take this little journey with you."

"I am glad to hear you say that."

"But, as it is," Zoë continued, smiling back his smile, "I cannot do a bold thing, because I should be risking my livelihood."

Nothing more was said on the subject. Delmar at once recovered his temper, more pleased than he could explain by Zoë's outspokenness, and the afternoon passed without a cloud.

When they had breakfasted and waited in the shade till the sun began its eastward slope, they retraced their way through the town, and, slowly ascending a winding road, found themselves on the summit of that green height they had so much admired from below. They now exchanged the close-shut view of ocean and heaven for a

wide, poetic prospect. The corn had been long since garnered, and on their leeside, far as the eye could reach, lay the rich brown fields and softly undulated golden pastures; opposite, one long, rocky island alone breaking the expanse, stretched a boundless sheet of glassy blue. Keeping their faces seawards, they soon came to the brow of the hill they had lately climbed, and followed a little path bordered with purslane hedges, that winded half way between the upper coast line and the sea. As they advanced, the scene changed; the rocks beneath, that had before been mere low-lying slabs barely covered with water, became gradually higher and more rugged in form, till, by-and-by, the two loiterers looked above a rocky rampart on the cool, soft-flowing, transparent water.

"Does this please you?" asked Delmar, when the two had walked for half a mile

without speaking. She was behind him, having stopped to gather a wild flower, and, as he turned round, had just added it to her posy. Flower-loving women are wont to smile thus at their fondlings, as if they were conscious, pleasure-loving things like themselves, and to Zoë's grateful heart these wild pinks and poppies seemed giving her a benediction like everything else that happy day.

"It is not in the least what I expected, but lovely all the same," she said; "and the air, how fresh, and briny, and reviving it is! I feel as if I could go on walking for ever!"

It is wonderful how the happiness tasted out of doors embellishes and rejuvenates! Zoë was still too young to need the latter process, but her quiet beauty was of a kind that, like certain pictures, wanted a certain light. He noticed with keener appreciation than before how pure and tender was the

outline of her cheek, how lovely the lines of the mouth—above all, how full of colour and soul the eyes. He noted, also, as she stooped here and there in her flower-gathering, the grace and proportion of every movement, the pretty hand, the dimpled wrist. And as he noticed all these again and again, he reproached Fate bitterly for having dealt so hardly with this dear and dainty piece of Nature's handiwork.

"Zoë," he said, as they walked on side by side, when her flower-gathering was finished, "do you know that there is no one in all the world for whom I feel half so sorry as I do for you?"

She laughed merrily.

"Why should you be sorry for me above all people? I am not like Huberte; I never have nervous headaches; I do not know what it is to faint out of sheer terror at the sight of a mouse; I do not live in

perpetual dread of what people say. And teaching comes to me as naturally now as eating and sleeping. Were I a cripple, a poor delicate little hunchback, or even lame, like our drawing-mistress, you might perhaps feel some compassion, but it is wasted now."

"I do not think so much of the present as of the future. You told me that you inherited nothing from your parents, and that you are not very well paid for your lessons," he added, trying to lead up to a more delicate subject still.

"But Huberte and I already begin to lay by a little. We have each put two thousand francs in the bank, and when we are old, intend to set up a little shop," Zoë answered, in the gayest manner. "Besides, a hundred unexpected things may happen before that time comes. Pray do not let us talk of the future to-day."

"Some other time, then," he said, himself not reluctant to put off the practical propositions he had made up his mind to lay before her. "When we have an opportunity, I should like to have a little business-like conversation with you. From a kinsman, such apparent meddling with your affairs should not come amiss."

"Please not now," Zoë put in, with almost a trembling intensity in her voice; then, as if that very moment her thoughts must take opposite flight, she said—"What an exquisite line yonder island makes against the clear blue sky!—how near it looks!—how delicious it would be to sail to it!"

"Ah! that is an undertaking!" Delmar said. "If we had two days at our disposal instead of a few hours, the thing might be done, and I have long wished to make the trip; but it is necessary to hire a little sailing-boat, and take the chance of contrary

winds, when, instead of three or four hours, the journey might occupy twenty. In fact, it would most likely be quite an adventure. It is, you must know, the strangest place; the people form quite a little colony apart, and whilst the men go fishing, the women cultivate the soil. Such hardy types you have never seen."

Poor Zoë continued to gaze wistfully at the purple island, so near, yet so far off! She longed for an adventure, and her life had hitherto been of the tamest. Delmar, breaking off from his poetic description of the people, saw the longing in her face.

"Let us go to-day!" he said. "When may you have such an opportunity again? We should most likely find a fishing-boat on the point of departure. The wind, I see, is favourable. We could spend an hour or two on the island, and return by moonlight just in time to catch the early train to

Les Ponts. You would not lose half an hour's lesson."

"You are bent on being impracticable," Zoë replied. "It would be delightful, but it cannot be. Perhaps even now we should retrace our way homewards."

"Nonsense; look at the sun. We need not turn back till the last glint of gold has vanished from the fields behind us. But you look tired. Take my arm, please."

She obeyed, and they strolled along leisurely, both having glided into the most indolent mood, when talking seems unnecessary, or the commonest word eloquent! And just as their animation had changed to dreaminess, so an indescribable harmony and peace stole over the level landscape above, and broad expanse of sea below. Much sooner than he had expected, the last broad patch of gold was lifted from the brown fallow land, the curtain of crim-

son and purple was drawn from the western sky, and evening came on, clear, starry, and brilliant, with those wonderfully outlined shadows seen only in these warm climates.

Though early by the clock, it was dusk when they started homewards on this, as it seemed to Zoë, interminably happy day, really ended. For do not all perfect days, like all journeys, come to an end when the climax of enjoyment is reached, and the rest is but looking back? The piece of railway travelling occupied several hours, their drive from the station half an hour, yet hardly a word was said, and no new impression added to the others.

"We may have another excursion before the autumn rains set in," Delmar said, at parting. "I am sure you need all the recreation you can get. You look a different person already, after these few hours of the sea!"

Zoë made her adieux hurriedly, and ran up the dark stone staircase with a heart full of strange, tormenting joy. Relieved to find that Huberte had not yet come home, she hastened to bed, anxious to have no intrusion on her happy thoughts or dreams. But the sound, unconscious slumber of youth and health soon put a stop to both, and, without a single break, she slept dreamlessly, as sleeps a tired child, till long dawn.

CHAPTER VII.

A DISCORD.

THE serpent can no more be perpetually banished from the cloister than the hearth, and the conviction had gradually dawned upon Father Gabriel's ingenuous mind that, even within the monastery walls, life may be vexatious, even bitter, at times. Hitherto his days had flowed on evenly and in unbroken satisfaction, each bringing its appointed duties, and unflagging appetite for all, each undoing, or at least obliterating, the faults of the last. Care had been unknown. Like the birds of heaven, who peck the autumn berry, never troubled about the winter crumbs, he had

no need to provide for the common needs of the morrow. So long as he lived, he knew that his bodily as well as his spiritual wants would be provided for, and that the ordinary drawbacks of existence could never be his; he would not have to toil and work for money, and all men were not his enemies, or at least his rivals, in the prevailing struggle for existence. Apart from the pushing, jostling, jealous crowd of humanity, he could go his quiet ways, fulfilling his career to the honour and glory of the Church, and in the service of God. He had always said to himself that his lines were cast in pleasant places, and naturally attributed to his calling the fact of a harmony as yet undisturbed by a single discord. Ah! therein lay the chief blessing and crowning satisfaction of his life. All had been perfect peace within and without.

There had, of course, been such checks as

only served to bring into stronger relief the tranquil happiness he enjoyed. Just as we all take comfort in the thought that, when certain lesser misfortunes happen, other and heavier blows will most likely be spared us, so did the young monk rejoice in the light burden which often seemed purposely laid on his shoulders to remind him that he was a child of sin, and, as such, under the ban of eternal displeasure. It had never entered into his calculations that this enviable monotony might undergo sudden change, and that troubles would arise he should find grievous to bear. He regarded, indeed, sorrows of the intenser kind as a part of that mundane lot he had renounced for ever, a deserved penalty of worldliness and sin. From his point of view, the world was, of course, another term for wickedness only, and those who, like himself, had chosen the better part, seemed deserving of the im-

munity they enjoyed. The dim perception that things going wrong without, might mean things going wrong within, struck him as a painful discovery. Once Delmar had said to him:

"Happy-fellow-mortal! Not to be troubled about domestic affairs, fortune-hunting and losing, about a conscience even, ever since you have put it in better hands than your own! Believing as you do that we are all bent on a foolish quest, how you must scoff at us, make merry with us, despise us! We must all appear to you as a Bedlam let loose, on which you only, a handful of sane, gaze with complacency."

To which Father Gabriel had replied, naïvely sincere,

"Yes. I pity you, my friend, with all my heart."

He said this smiling on his companion as a millionaire, driving in the dust and

glare of the day, might smile on a stone-breaker sweating by the way-side. There seemed a gulf of separation between them. But was it so after all? The young man tormented himself with the pettiness and frailty his present disquietude brought to light. Here he was just as happily circumstanced as before, having congenial work, delightful ambitions, at one with his own heart, troubled as yet by no shadow of spiritual doubt or perplexity; yet the days had become burdensome, and the monastery a prison. He longed for the usual hours of recreation, when he quitted the retreat he had loved so well and resorted to Delmar, or other friends. Those once agreeable talking meals were now less welcome than the silent ones, the common duties and common occupations of his life were marred, the bread in his mouth was no longer sweet, the wine no longer refreshed. In fine, he had

begun by losing temper with himself, and now he was losing heart. And why?

A few weeks before another stranger had come to the monastery, a man of perhaps forty-five years, of good presence and wide acquirements; but for whom, at the first glance, anyone so ingenuous-minded and pure-hearted as Father Gabriel could not help entertaining an aversion. It was the pallid-faced, dark-browed Capucin, Zoë and Huberte had seen by chance in the chapel; and exactly as his countenance affected the innocent minds of the two women, so it affected that of the young monk. Father Ephraim, as the new-comer was called, had the least possible to do with the young professor in philosophy. The two were not compelled to hold any intercourse beyond that limited to outward courtesy; not speaking each other's language, their conversation had to be carried on in Latin, moreover, which was an

obstacle to the free interchange of thought, and the difference of age alone widened the separation. Yet the younger man from the moment this strange, saturnine being joined the little community, felt that an ever-watchful, ever-suspicious eye was upon him, perhaps the eye of sheer curiosity only, but insupportable all the same.

In plain words, then, the secret of Father Gabriel's inward discontent was the novel sensation of a personal dislike amounting to repulsion, and the oppressive consciousness that this feeling was not only perceived but reciprocated. Under the ordinary conditions of life, such a circumstance is not weighty. Those who live in the world can easily avoid the companionship they find antagonistic; but how different within the walls of a monastery! There no escape is offered from a voice that grates, an eye that disconcerts, a personality that irritates. And

for the first time in his life Father Gabriel found his self-imposed fetters galling.

Why was it that two men brought accidentally together should regard each other as enemies without any cause, real or imagined? Was it because the one was saturnine, gloomy, evil-intentioned; the other joyous, guileless, of a transparent nature? Because the one revelled ghoul-like in his withered hopes and scattered ambitions, whilst the other sported airily amid his glowing beliefs and heaven-like dreams? Was it because the one was by comparison old in years and broken down in health, and the other, in the bloom of health, had not known a care or a sin, and had not even tasted such common bodily suffering as befalls the rest of humanity? Or perhaps it might be simply the instinctive abhorrence and perpetual warfare of Good and Evil, Beauty and Ugliness, Inno-

cence and Perversity seen from all time.

Hitherto Father Gabriel had loved everyone about him—superiors, teachers, fellow-monks, humble lay-brothers—all those with whom he consorted daily, as well as such chance acquaintances as he had, from time to time, made outside the community. The ceaseless wear and tear of a personal antagonism, the harassing sense of disadvantage, and even injustice thereby called forth, on both sides, were all mental phases through which he was painfully passing for the first time.

"You have a new member added to your community?" Delmar said to him one day, after seeing all the brotherhood accidentally pass by in a religious procession. "A tall, imposing figure with a picturesquely villainous face." He stopped short, reproved by his friend's admonitory frown, and added,

"I beg your pardon for describing a

monk as I should any ordinary person. That is, if I mistake not, a southern type of physiognomy."

"Yes, he comes from the Pyrenees, and is nobly born," answered Father Gabriel, without any change of countenance. "You laymen are apt to imagine that renunciation on a large scale is a thing of the past among us, and that the ancient fire no longer animates the breast of the true believer. How little do you know of what silently and unpretentiously takes place! Look at this man, for example. Here is one born to the most alluring prospects the mind can conceive—wealth, inherited position and influence, a brilliant career. All these were before him, yet he has chosen to take upon himself the vows of perpetual poverty and obedience."

"Indeed!" Delmar remarked, adding drily —"His look is not that of a saint, anyhow."

"Remember the charming apologue of La Fontaine, and its moral—

'Garde-toi, tant que tu vivras,
De juger les gens sur la mine,'"

replied the young monk, with perfect composure. He had naturally acquired the art of readily veiling his thoughts. From his look and manner now, it was quite possible to conceive that the subject of their conversation was his ideal.

"Yes, how little do we know even our friends? I am not sure when I look at you, for instance—young, gay, gracious as you are—that in your heart of hearts you are not a would-be ascetic, a recluse, a hermit like the saints of old."

This was said half in jest, half in gentle irony, for Delmar had a faint suspicion that underneath his friend's natural candour lay a vein of Jesuitical tact.

The Capucin thus interrogated, threw back

his head, lifted up his eyes, and, as he spoke, swayed gently backwards and forwards, as if under the influence of sudden spiritual illumination, herein again displaying the artificial part of his training. Such looks, gestures, and attitudes had been inculcated from his earliest years as becoming and necessary accompaniments to certain phases of conversation.

"Were it so, should I not hearken to the divine voice within?" he said, in a rapt voice—"should I squander my days in the pursuits of mundane philosophy, when I could acquire, by direct communication with the All-wise, that highest philosophy, we call religion? Alas! you misread me here. I would that it were otherwise, and that I could feel myself drawn away to the wilderness like St. Jerome or St. Hilairius, there to shine amid prevailing darkness as a lamp perpetually burning to the glory of

the Church. As yet, the call has not come. I do not say that it never will."

"Do I understand you that such a craving for solitude and self-abnegation would not only be permitted but encouraged, and that you or any other priest are at liberty to retire into a cavern and mortify your flesh after the manner of those holy men?"

"Without doubt a true call to the abstinence and sanctity of our great exemplars would be accepted as heaven-sent, and, therefore, to be obeyed," answered the young man, with deep seriousness.

Delmar could not resist a smile. He said nothing, however, fearing to offend, and the monk resumed—

"I see disapproval in your face, but, my good sir, cast a glance upon this money-making, money-loving city, where a gloss of Catholicism covers a wide-spreading incredulity. Is not something more than

common piety and belief wanted to arouse the hearts, and quicken the consciences, of a population like this, not more light-minded, and certainly less selfish, than that of many other large cities, but living, for the most part, without God in the world?"

"I admit that something is wanted; yet remember another Scriptural apothegm about putting old wine into new bottles."

"We will discuss that point to-morrow," said the monk, his usually ingenuous way of putting off a discussion till he had fortified himself with arguments; and so their conversation ended, both, however, dwelling upon it afterwards, Delmar with curiosity, Father Gabriel with all kinds of vague aspirations.

Why, thought Delmar, only his question was of too delicate a nature to put to his friend as yet—perhaps, when their intimacy was matured, it might be done—why should

not Father Ephraim or Father Gabriel, if their wishes for the mortification of the flesh were dominant, undertake the duties and undergo the privation of the so-called lay-brothers in the monastery—those humble, uncomplaining individuals who perform all servile offices for the rest? To clean floors, cook dinners, wait on your equals, and be all the time debarred from the material as well as intellectual advantages they enjoy—not having access to the well-stocked library, for instance—might well satisfy the intensest longing for humiliation. These, however, were questions he felt it more prudent to defer, being sure that, for the present, Father Gabriel would leave the discussion of them for another day.

The monk, for his part, left his companion in a wholly altered frame of mind. He had sought Delmar's society as a relief from self, and a grating sense of his own little-

ness; he quitted it buoyed up with a consciousness of new and pregnant individuality. Who could tell what high destiny he was born to fulfil? Might not these small vexations be sent to wrench him from the world, and from the ever down-dragging Ego? Might they not come as reminders that life held for him a purpose and a largeness of which up till now he had not received the faintest indication? How could he for a moment dream that existence meant only the smooth, rounded, unperplexed thing so pleasantly familiar to him? Without doubt a time was coming when his destiny should declare itself, if not by a call to the wilderness, by some other spiritual behest, for which he must wait in prayer and in fasting. The unwelcome presence, almost viperish gaze, and rasping voice of Father Ephraim, might be signs, not of Divine displeasure, singling out to be punished and tormented for

sin, but rather love, bent on his uplifting and purifying. He was, perhaps, to be tried in the fire; such minor martyrdoms were intended to strengthen him against the hour of trial when it should come.

For some days after his conversation with Delmar, he revelled in these novel, bewildering thoughts. He joyfully accepted the companionship that was so repulsive to him; he even put himself in the way of Father Ephraim's paralyzing look and mocking voice; he courted rather than avoided his marked dislike. Of course this silent antagonism remained a secret between the two men. They met with the ordinary forms of courtesy, and gave rise by unusual conduct to no observation. It was only noted that a sneer would rise to the older man's lips whilst he listened to the philosophical teachings of the younger, and that, in discussion, he was apt to smile him down

superciliously. Perhaps this might mean an assertion of intellectual superiority only, thought the rest, for it was well known that the new-comer was skilled in those branches of learning Father Gabriel was appointed to teach. Personal likings and dislikings within the walls of a monastery or convent, moreover, like other expressions of individuality, are forcibly kept in the background, although they doubtless effect as much joy or misery there as elsewhere.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MONK AND THE MAIDEN.

IN spite of the new direction given to his thoughts, Father Gabriel no less persistently followed up the old. The additional fervour imparted to his daily existence, and the spur given to his hitherto halting ambitions, was now manifested in redoubled intensity of thought and life. All things seemed created afresh, quickened into second being by his own dawning sense of intellectual as well as spiritual power, to be fully made manifest when the divinely appointed time should come.

Far from losing interest in all that lay

beyond the world of his religious duties, he now felt increased sympathy with the no less real world of which Delmar and Zoë formed the central figures. Who could tell but that their acquaintance might be just as providential as that other distasteful one, and that herein again might be traced the finger of God? Two choice natures, two souls worth saving, were here, only awaiting to be perfected by reconciliation with the Church.

Delmar and his beautiful kinswoman, no matter what their theological beliefs might be, possessed that faculty of reverence which is often another name for piety itself; who could tell what light he might impart to them? Conversion as yet did not present itself to his mind as a practical object, but many intermediate stages lay between no creed at all and the one true and only faith. He knew that his friends were delicate-minded,

sincere, charitable, but, as far as he could discover, the Protestantism of the one, and the Catholicism of the other, were equally neutral. Surely there was some possibility of stirring them with his own enthusiasm, moving them by his own zeal, whether shown in deed or word. Again, for some reason or other, the lives of both were not rounded to completeness by any social or domestic tie; they were units, not members of a family; cut off by accident, choice, or necessity from the sweetness of the home and fireside circle. This was another reason for hope, and another opening for proselytism. They were certainly more accessible than if hemmed round by the multitudinous influences and responsibilities of family life. Wild as these dreams might appear to outsiders, the young monk cherished them, and hailed any opportunity of intercourse as a means of effecting spiritual good.

Thus when accident threw him again in Zoë's way, he mentioned the fact in his pious prayers with ecstatic gratitude.

The meeting happened accidentally. Father Gabriel had an old friend living at Les Ponts, Mrs. O'Meara, a countrywoman, and, like himself, a devout Catholic. Her husband had opened a new branch of commerce in this part of France, and Mrs. O'Meara, now rich, elderly, and a widow, preferred her adopted country, as offering larger scope for a rich devotee than England. She had met Zoë by chance in a convent school-room, and being struck with the girl's sweet looks and dignified manner, at once adopted her into that large circle of friends she was able to patronise without impertinence.

Mrs. O'Meara could not live without something gay, young, and gracious

about her, of kindred sweetness with her pet birds and flowers. So whenever Zoë would consent to partake of the daily feasts spread for those who fared meagrely at home, she was most welcome, and it was upon the occasion of a visit that the young monk encountered her.

Mrs. O'Meara was occupied at the time with another visitor, her confessor and especial friend, the Abbé X. Father Gabriel, therefore, had a quarter of an hour's uninterrupted conversation with Zoë. He found her far surpassing the Zoë of his recollections. As he looked at the sweet picture before him he acknowledged that she more nearly approached his ideal of beauty than any woman he had ever seen. She was dressed with nun-like simplicity, but without nun-like primness and severity of outline. The hanging sleeves showing the lovely wrist

and arm, the large, square linen collar turned carelessly off the delicate throat, the crimsoned flower fastened in her brooch, the long amply-flowing skirt, the wind-tossed, sun-kissed hair glowing in such abundance—all these had a certain mundane grace and picturesqueness, especially fascinating to unaccustomed eyes. Taking in these details, the young man noted also that there was an unremembered expression about the eyes and mouth—an almost indefinite something—he hardly knew whether to call it pensiveness or joy—that indicated a growth of being, an added fulness of life, a larger expression of thought and feeling. Zoë, like himself, and to use his own words, had lived intensely of late. Thus much was evident to so keen an observer.

"I greatly wished to see you again, Miss Delmar," he began, assuming that just per-

ceptibly paternal air admissible in one of his sacred calling, no matter how young. "I wanted to learn if you had read the life of St. Francis I lent you, and how your mind was thereby affected."

"I read the book without missing a word," Zoë answered, looking at him with that frankness he found as much of a charm in a lay-woman as her dress. "But, pardon me for saying so, it did not awaken my enthusiasm; it did not give me any emotions."

"You are hard to impress," he said, qualifying the disparaging speech with the tenderest look of fatherly concern. Zoë hastened to explain herself, which she did as easily and naturally as if she were expounding English grammar to a little pupil.

"It seems to me," she continued, still looking at him fearlessly, "that such ideals belong entirely to the past. We may be called upon every day to practise renuncia-

tion in the world as complete as that of the saints and martyrs in the Church."

"What is renunciation unless carried out for the glory of God?" said the monk, warmly. "You may not, perhaps, intend to do so, but whilst you argue thus, you ignore the great, the primary fact of revealed religion."

"What is religion?" Zoë asked, very earnestly. "May not the very beauty and single-mindedness of a life be called religion? Do you doubt that there are women, for instance, living outside the cloister, without a thought of self, veritable Sisters of Mercy in ordinary dress? Their theology set aside, are such lives spent in vain?"

"As far as the great purpose of humanity is concerned, certainly in vain, not so, of course, in reference to their own narrow, circumscribed existence. But what is this portion of their reward? Dust and ashes,

emptiness and despair, whilst all who have enrolled themselves in the ranks of the true Church feel that they are carrying out the design for which mankind was created."

Zoë was silent. The young man continued, with glowing cheeks and dilating eyes,

"Take, for instance, the case of latter-day martyrdoms in this country of France, where any day a man may have to offer himself a willing sacrifice either to his religion or his political convictions. In the former instance there may be as much nobility of purpose, as much heroism, as much self-annihilation, as in the latter; but what a gulf divides the martyr of humanity from the martyr of religious truth! To argue otherwise is to set the creature above the Creator, the mortal above the immortal, the body above the imperishable soul."

Seeing that he argued in a circle, and yet somewhat overpowered by his ready elo-

quence, Zoë was again silent. He imagined that he had convinced her, and added—

"Your judgments may now go with me against your will. A time shall assuredly come when you will realise the full force of my words—when you will say to yourself, 'Yes, it is so—it cannot be otherwise; there is something higher, larger, better than our own petty passions and miserably narrow existences. The monk was right. We are born, not for the world, not for ourselves, but for that Love, that is high above us as the heavens are high above the earth.'"

"All this I believe already," Zoë answered, suddenly roused into a tender, beseeching enthusiasm. "The only difference between those who die for their creeds, and those who die for their fellow-creatures, seems to me that the first sacrifice themselves for one kind of love, and the last for another. But in the eyes of God may not

all love and all self-sacrifice be acceptable and equal?"

"That is beautifully said," the monk replied, "but rather a proposition than an argument." Then, seeing that the Abbé X. rose from his seat, and that their talk was drawing to a close, he added, again with that air of priestly, paternal insinuation, not incongruous even in a monk of twenty-four—"Of one thing I am quite sure, namely, that were you called upon to sacrifice all that you hold dearest—nay, life itself—to the truth, no matter in what form it might present itself, you would not draw back."

"I hope not," Zoë answered, quite simply. A moment later, she was beckoned away by Mrs. O'Meara to serve the coffee. The Abbé took his place beside the Capucin, and another visitor, also a priest, dropped in.

Father Gabriel never forgot the pleasantness of that short afternoon visit at Mrs. O'Meara's, nor the light that Zoë's presence made in the place. As she moved about, waiting, after French provincial fashion, upon the guests, she seemed to him the very personification of feminine captivatingness and grace. The difference of age between them imparted the same kind of fascination to him that a very young girl often possesses in the eyes of older men. Her staidness, her repose, her benignity of manner, soothed him, and put him at once into a delicious frame of mind. What Father Gabriel felt was more than mere personal interest of the intenser kind. If he should never meet her again, never more sun himself in the sweetness of those blue eyes, he said to himself that he was richer as long as he lived for that brief acquaintance; whilst the slight superiority of those additional

years gave her a dignity and sacredness before him that would surely make any future intercourse easy and profitable. He was convinced that Zoë, like Delmar, would do him good, and not harm, whenever they were thrown in each other's way.

The coffee drinking and agreeable general talk seemed deplorably short to Father Gabriel, who could not help contrasting the flavour of coffee when poured out by a dainty creature like Zoë, and by an automaton-like lay-brother in coarse brown serge!

The short collation was now at an end, the Abbé X. had risen to go, and already the ceremonious French leave-taking had begun. The young man had just time to interchange a few more hurried words with Zoë before saying adieu.

"What has happened to our friend Delmar of late?" he asked, with a look of concern. "Is he suffering in body or in mind?

He was strangely absent—I may say uncongenial—the last time I saw him, so much so that I thought it friendlier not to repeat my visit."

Zoë, with a tremendous effort at self-control, checked the blush she felt mounting to her cheeks, and answered coldly,

"I have not seen Mr. Delmar for a week,"—this short space of seven days seemed almost interminable when it had reference to him. Father Gabriel noticed the want of ease in her manner as she said this, and continued—

"I trust all is going well with him; but he is too mysterious about himself and his personal affairs. He cuts himself from the sympathy of his friends," the monk said, looking straight into Zoë's honest eyes. It was on his lips to add more, but something in Zoë's looks checked him. He merely added—"And will not let us advise, or, at least, sympathise with him."

Zoë had listened trembling inwardly, without a word to say. Father Gabriel, feeling that he had affronted her susceptibilities, changed the subject.

And now at last he was compelled to go, carrying away with him all kinds of fresh poetic impressions, wholly unconscious of the uneasiness he had left behind. Why should Father Gabriel talk to her of Delmar thus inquisitorially? What mattered it to her whether Delmar was mysterious about his personal affairs or not?

The only part of the monk's conversation that Zoë could not forget was that brief reference to Delmar.

CHAPTER IX.

EXPLANATIONS.

THE little week of which poor Zoë had spoken so wistfully to Father Gabriel, implied a whole epoch of inner existence. During that time she had made up her quarrel with Huberte; after a reconciliation the two friends had quarrelled again, finally with many tears and mutual self-reproaches they had come to a clear understanding, and were faster friends than before. Zoë could better appreciate a jog-trot affection like Huberte's just now, when on the verge of losing a less certain and far more absorbing

attachment. She had decided to tell Delmar that they must not meet any more.

She saw at last that Huberte's objections on the score of expediency were valid. With the problem of bread-winning to solve unaided and alone, some rules of life were obligatory, which, as a rich woman, she might have utterly disregarded. She must either give up Huberte and Huberte's strict code of propriety, or Delmar; in other words, she must choose between a steadfast friend and a tolerably sure livelihood, or a transient comradeship and another start in the world. Thus matters stood as far as outward circumstances were concerned; and with regard to her inner life, different causes had brought about the same result. She had made up her mind to relinquish Delmar's friendship because it no longer gave her unruffled joy, because she was

beginning to share Huberte's uneasiness about herself, although nothing would have induced her to confess it.

Yes, she must give up all that of late had wrapped grinding toil and sordid care in an atmosphere of gold; that had charmed her senses beyond infection of sorrow and regret; that had opened the flood-gates of heart, soul, intellect to the light-giving, life-bestowing influences of perfect sympathy! She had but yielded to a seducing belief that existence was entirely blissful and desirable, and now the time of disenchantment that comes to all had come—poor fool!—to her. The difficulty of telling him her resolution seemed insurmountable. She ought to do so by word of mouth, and by word of mouth, therefore, it must be done. But how much easier even the writing of a half explanatory letter, a letter that should soften down everything, and

almost make it seem as if they should go on friendly in the old way!

"Write," Huberte had first said. "Women can hide their feelings on paper as cleverly as men. But when it comes to words, we are lost; our tears are always ready to betray us."

"I am bound to see him," Zoë replied, and in a certain tone of her many-toned voice that told Huberte further argument was useless.

So instead of a femininely worded circumlocution, which might or might not indicate the writer's meaning, she calmly and coldly wrote two lines to Delmar, saying that she wanted particularly to see him, and begging him to appoint a meeting place.

"Dear Zoë," he replied. "I also have something urgent to say to you. Let us meet to-morrow afternoon at the omnibus

office, and go into the country to talk there.—L. D."

Accordingly by two o'clock the next day the pair met where they had so often and so joyously awaited each other before. But to-day they were both a little late; one omnibus had started, another would not be up for half an hour, and the short autumn afternoon allowed of no delay.

"We will walk instead," Delmar said, looking deplorably out of spirits. "I would rather not go over the old ground. Let us strike out in a new direction, and try to get on the green hills above the river. There must be a way, though I have never yet been able to discover it."

They quitted the boulevards and climbed a narrow suburban street winding upwards, having on each side high garden walls, now glistening blindingly in the October sunshine. Behind these monotonous prison-

like enclosures, were pleasant villas surrounded by flower-gardens, orchards, and vineyards, but anything more depressing than the exterior cannot be imagined. The City of a Hundred Bridges is hemmed in on this side indeed with miles and miles of labyrinthine alleys, and when once in the net-work, a stranger is at no little pains to get out again.

"How hideous is all this!" Delmar said, shrugging his shoulders. "You will see we shall only make a circuit, and come back to the starting-point. Yet we have made for those refreshing green slopes overlooking the river as straight as the crow flies. They are close to us, but we shall never reach them."

He spoke truly. For half an hour they wandered between high white walls, now going to the right, now to the left, invariably returning to very nearly the precise spot

from which they had started. The dust was lying several inches thick on the ground, the white limestone affected their eyes painfully, the glare of the sunshine became less and less supportable. Delmar at last dropped wearily to the ground in an angle of shadow, and motioned Zoë to sit down also. So like two vagrants they squatted by the wayside, leaning back on the wall.

Not so much as a common wild-flower was growing near. Not the tiniest cloud flecked the burning blue sky. Not the twitter of a sparrow broke the stillness. Which of the two would begin to speak first? Zoë looked sideways at Delmar. Delmar, a moment after, glanced at her. Then Zoë, who was the most impetuous, and the braver of the two where pain was concerned, especially the pain to be inflicted on another, began—

"My cousin Lionel, you will blame me, I know, for what I am going to say. You

will perhaps misunderstand my conduct, and think meanly of me as long as you live in consequence. But for all that I must speak out. I cannot any longer keep silent."

He sat passively, never doubting, as she saw, what was in her mind, and this gave her courage to go on to the end.

"I am bound to take leave of you. I have, as you know, my bread to win, and if I lose my good name, I lose all that I possess. This is why we cannot see each other any more."

Nothing could be simpler, more practical, at the same time more dignified, than such an explanation, and Zoë had given it with the full assurance of meeting a stormy remonstrance. What was her astonishment when Delmar merely said, in the saddest, tenderest manner,

"The more's the pity. It is harder upon me than upon you, Zoë, after all."

"How can that be?" Zoë answered, determined to keep to the rigidly common-place bearings of the question, and to avoid, as far as possible, all reference to deeper feelings on both sides. "You are a man, and can vary your life as much as you please. I am a woman, and am condemned to the hum-drum drudgery of teaching for the rest of my days. Those pleasant country walks and talks were naturally more to me than to you."

"You do not know what you are saying, when you say that," Delmar said; then he waited, as if anxious that she should go on, but Zoë thought it was now his turn to speak.

"This is all I had to say to you. What did you want to say to me?" she asked, with that matchless candour he had ever found so attractive. "Let us get our explanations over, and then go on a little further. It is stifling here."

Certainly a less enticing halting place could not be imagined. Every moment the afternoon sun seemed to burn down with fiercer rays, and the white wall hemming them in seemed to grow more prison-like, whilst the stillness and torpor around but deepened as the hours wore on. How different from the fairy-like glades and bird-singing scenes amongst which they had rested to talk in days gone by! Then the sunshine, so hated now, had been joy-giving and welcome! Zoë thought to herself, and perhaps some such thought was in Delmar's mind, too, that herein lay a symbolization of her future life; for was not all that had gladdened henceforth turned to pain? and did not these narrow walls indicate the coming monotony from which there was no escape? At last he said, not speaking bravely, as she had done, but with painful hesitation, and a paleness on his cheeks that increased as he went on,

"I also had made up my mind, Zoë, that, for my own sake as much as for yours, we had better separate. You should surely know my reasons too."

He gazed for a moment on her sweet face, then turned away, and with his eyes bent on the ground, toiled painfully through his sentence.

"You should have known it long ago—I ought to have told you when we first met—I am married."

Both were silent, he looking one way, she another, her eyes filled with sudden tears, her breath drawn quickly. In that first moment of heart-sickening, her natural woman's impulse was to hide at any cost the struggle going on within, and to let him suspect anything but the truth. He gave her a little time by continuing—

"I have injured myself most, yet I have done you wrong. Had I told you the truth

from the beginning, our relations would have been easy and uncompromising, and we should now have been spared these explanations. But I did not dream that we should become so much to each other, and it was not easy to draw back afterwards."

"Oh, let us forget it!" Zoë cried, passionately, and making an effort to rise. "Let us not stay here and talk about ourselves any longer."

"You *must* hear me out," he said, drawing her gently to her seat. "It will not take long."

She obeyed tremblingly. It comforted her to see that he was quite as unnerved as herself. In his endeavour, indeed, to obtain self-mastery, he hardly noticed her agitation.

"Why did I not tell you at first?" he continued, with his head still averted, and his eyes fixed on the ground. "You have

a right to ask the question. I cannot answer it. I would give all I possess to undo that piece of cowardice now."

"It is past and done," Zoë said, feeling deeply compassionate at the sight of his wretchedness—conscious, moreover, that she was the braver and the stronger of the two in the struggle. "We must forget."

"And forgive, Zoë. Can you pardon me?"

"What have I to forgive?" she asked, very proudly. "I am not a child. I have been the mistress of my actions all along, and such as they are, I must take the consequences of them."

The ringing truthfulness and almost vindictive self-assertion of this speech made matters easier for both. He felt it much less difficult to go on, and both gradually calmed as he added, in even tones,

"There is no man in all the world so

lonely as I, and, as far as my marriage is concerned, I cannot take any blame to myself. The chain had to be worn, gall as it might. Is it any wonder that I should try to make the best of such friendship as came in the shape of a consolation? You grew to be my nearest and dearest friend. The love, or what I supposed to be love, that I bore for the woman I made my wife, was turned to bitterness in the first years of our marriage. The truth must be told; we were unsuited to each other—we have long been separated. When I first knew you, I shrank from telling you this painful story, and I could not foresee then that harm would come of keeping silence. You were my kinswoman, and the hardness and isolation of your life struck me painfully. At first I only wanted to act a friendly, brotherly part to you; so it came about that, by little and little, we learned to know each

other intimately, and the more intimate we grew, the more difficult it seemed to begin these explanations."

He turned round, and added, with a touch of his old fond, playful manner—

"If it were wrong, at least it was natural to enjoy the present without thinking of the future. It seemed just possible that we might go on making each other happy always."

"I am sorry for you," Zoë said, "I am sorry for myself too. But let us make an end. There is surely nothing more to be said."

Again she half rose, and again he drew her gently back. With a sigh of desperate resignation she awaited the rest. Just as those blissful afternoons with him in golden summer glades had seemed interminable, so this purgatory seemed as if it would never come to an end. He went on—

"Dear Zoë, I shall most likely leave in a few days, most probably not returning here for weeks, nay, months, even perhaps not at all. What else I have to say to you, therefore, must be said now. Soon after we first knew each other, I had it in my mind to offer you the half of my fortune. You are my kinswoman. I have no family claims upon me. It shall be made legally yours if you survive me. Will you consent to share my worldly possessions as a token that you really forgive me?"

"What right have I to your money?" Zoe answered again, speaking almost haughtily. "I am none the less grateful because I refuse. Pray believe that."

"Hear me a moment. We have been the best friends. We have spent the happiest days together. Show me in doing this that at least you once cared to have me as your friend!"

"What good can talking do? It was as you say, and you are kind, but I cannot take your money," Zoë said, flushed and eager. "I can earn my bread, and that is enough."

"But you are a woman, and of my kith and kin. In offering this, I only act as any other relation might do," Delmar continued, with cheerful persuasiveness. "You are young now, and have abundance of spirit. But nothing is more precarious than the bread-winning of a teacher; and if you fall ill, or your opportunities fail, I cannot work for you, shelter you, protect you—would to Heaven that I could! But in making over to you the half of my modest heritage I can ensure you against anxiety, the necessity of work. That is something."

"Work is the salvation of lonely women. I could not support an idle existence," Zoë said, still aggressive; "every

minute of the day has its appointed task, and when night comes I am too tired to lie awake and think. The ease you speak of would drive me mad."

He pondered for a little, and leaning back on the wall, she also gathered strength for a fresh encounter. Was there no end to this insupportable talk, no escape from this hateful place? The sun beating overhead, the blinding bit of granite opposite, the monotony of his sad voice, grew more and more like intense bodily pain.

"You could work as much as you pleased," he went on. "You need not touch your money, interest or principal, for years. There, in case of illness or untoward circumstances, it would be. Indeed, I must induce you to accept my offer."

"When I am too old to work, or if I fall ill, I will write to you, and you shall help

me, because you are of my blood and name. I promise that," Zoë said, smiling faintly, and feeling that herein she made a tremendous concession.

"But you forget that you might not know where to find me. I am a wanderer, here one day, leagues away the next. No, Zoë, let your good, straightforward English common sense decide in my favour. Who can tell what may happen? In such a country as France it is always well to have access to a few thousand francs. A revolution might compel you to flee to-morrow, and in such emergencies women must be more helpless than men. Or some misfortune may befall your friend Huberte—"

"Huberte has a constitution of iron, and has already a little money laid by. It is useless to try to persuade me. But I will tell you what you may do," Zoë answered. "You say that you are going away soon, and

may never come back again. You can leave a little money in the bank here in my name. If calamity overtake me, I promise you to use it. If not, it will be there whenever you wish to dispose of it otherwise."

That small compromise smoothed matters more than she had ventured to hope. Delmar's face brightened, and his eyes dwelt upon her approvingly, as he replied, taking out his pocket-book with a business-like air,

"Here is the address of my banker. You have only to present yourself at the office, and sign your name below the amount you wish to draw. Take great care of it, please."

She took the card with cold, uncareful fingers, and put it hastily in her purse. To Zoë's mind it presented no more notion of a weighty possibility than a falling autumn leaf, but Delmar continued to dilate upon its practical importance.

"There will be a sum of twenty thousand francs in ready money for you, to draw at a day's notice, if you like, and my agents here will be prepared to increase the sum if necessary. But having agreed to this, why not yield an inch more, and take the half of all I possess?"

"Please let us go now, and not talk about it any more," Zoë urged, this time with tears in her eyes, which he could not help seeing. He marked, also, the unnatural whiteness of her cheeks, and the artificial poise of her voice, never raised, never dropped from its hard, unnatural key. They quitted the unenticing spot, and descended rapidly, talking of common things.

The delicious part of the day was yet to come, and Delmar, without a word, led her farther and farther from the heart of the city. Along quiet quays, ever keeping westward, they went, amid the gradually deepen-

ing hues of river, wooded hills and sky, entering step by step into the enchanted world of twilight and the stars. With almost indescribable swiftness, the sun now dropped behind the pine-tops, and the moon took her place in the warm purple heavens, shedding tender light upon the rippling waves. How still it was by the river-side! Only a few barges, laden with wool and timber, made their sleepy way towards the harbour, or a fairy-like canoe danced past them lightly as a bird, or here and there, from a busy pent-house below, came the monotonous beat of the washerwoman's mallet. Soon the greyness and pearliness of vanishing day were replaced by the radiance and clearness of the night. The white villas rising above hanging gardens flashed marble-like in the moonlight, every object near and far off showed a definite outline against the silvery sky, whilst towering state-

lily above all rose the grand old city, with its countless spires and cathedral towers crowning all, massive as if cut out of granite.

Delmar and his companion gazed long and lingeringly on the enchanting scene. They had reached the last suburban bridge on the outer side of the city, and now rested on a pier-head, both wanting to speak. At last he said, that melodious voice in exact harmony just then with the scene and the hour,

"What delicious things we have seen together! You will not forget them, Zoë?"

"How can I forget them? They are pictures as real to me as if each were framed and hanging on my walls," she replied. She felt, indeed, that having such memories as these, he would always be near her in the spirit, however far removed in the letter.

"Such delight may become a tie, preternaturally strong," he went on, conscious of

the answer in her eye. "There are certain aspects of every-day landscapes which will henceforth give me pain when I am alone. Out-door life—the best part of mine hitherto —will be dead to me when I lose you, Zoë."

"We are growing older, things are sure to change for both of us," she said, losing momentary self-control. "We may die!" she cried, wildly, weeping behind her veil.

Unable to offer comfort, he led her home.

CHAPTER X.

DRIFTING.

LIFE too often treats us as guests are dealt with, according to the rule of religious houses. For three days the visitor in a monastery is feasted royally; the best viands are prepared for him, the choicest wines are uncellared for him, liqueurs, almost worth a king's ransom, are brought out in his honour, and a general air of festive rejoicing pervades the community. But after the third day, the stranger takes his place unnoticed at the common board. Dainties are no longer provided.

He is welcome to stay, but his stay as a guest is over, and henceforth he will be treated as a member of the family.

Thus it befalls many of us at the onset of life, which begins with a salvo of welcome and a princely banquet, soon after to be exchanged for cold oblivion and ordinary fare. Yesterday we felt ourselves kings or queens, and the world wore a look of pageantry for our sakes; to-day we are poor relations, cold meat company called in when the feast is over, or beggars watering our crust with bitter tears. In these sumptuary laws of monastic institutions, therefore, may be discerned a deep symbolic lesson, and well for those who have learned it in an early stage of their pilgrimage.

A feeling of bitter disenchantment took possession of the three friends after Delmar's departure. To Zoë it seemed as if

both he and Father Gabriel had dropped out of her life altogether. Why, indeed, should she wish to see the young Capucin now? She had but looked at him through Delmar's eyes, and liked him because of Lionel's liking. She determined to avoid the only probable meeting-place—namely, Mrs. O'Meara's drawing-room—for the future, so distasteful was the notion of another conversation with Father Gabriel. He would be sure to talk to her of Lionel, and she could not talk of him any more. Even with her bosom-friend Huberte that was impossible just now.

"Yes," thought Zoë, as she leaned on the window-sill and looked across the neutral autumn landscape—river, banks, and far-stretching pastures now all blurred and blotted with the chill November rain, "Lionel is sad because he knows what life is like. I have been gay hitherto because I

had not learned, now I shall never be gay in the old way again."

Certainly the existence of a lay-teacher forced to go hither and thither to her pupils, was not exhilarating in those days of perpetual rain-fall. The convents stood mostly somewhat apart from the great thoroughfares, so that she could neither make use of omnibuses nor the boats on the river. In England she would have found a blazing hearth on arriving, but in these exquisitely clean and spacious convent school-rooms fires were not dreamed of, except in unusually cold weather, and the spotless floors remained uncarpeted from January to December. A foot-warmer, certainly, was provided, but to have the soles of the feet made burning hot by a wooden box filled with red ashes, whilst the rest of the body is chill and shivering, can hardly be called a creature-comfort.

The weather was far from bitter, winter,

in our sense of the word, rarely visiting these favoured regions till after Christmas, and then making the shortest stay; but it was deplorably damp, gloomy, and monotonous. A city like the City of a Hundred Bridges, built upon the confluence of two rivers, both given to terribly rapid overflows, grows melancholy after two or three weeks of continuous downpour. The familiar aspect of its animated streets suffers a gradual translation. The dash, the glitter, the sparkle disappear. People cluster together in anxious groups, watching the sullen skies and the swollen river. Nothing is talked of but *La crue, la crue*—the rising, the rising! You may hear the word pronounced fifty times in a quarter of an hour's walk, everybody praying that these may not soon be exchanged for more ominous words still,—the inundation, the inundation!

So that alike within and without Zoë's life, after Delmar's departure, was of the dreariest. Huberte was overwhelmed with apprehension about the threatened inundation, and had not a hopeful word, nor as much as a smile at her disposal. Delmar was gone, and she could not look forward to his home-coming. Nothing seemed worth thinking about just then, and conversation the veriest hypocrisy under the sun.

Delmar, for his part, hardly knew whether he intended to return or not. Father Gabriel had said to him at parting,

"You will soon come back to us?" and the other had replied, almost curtly,

"That depends upon circumstances. I cannot say now what my movements may be."

"But," urged the young man, with the bold candour of youth, that is not to be put down by even downright unkindness, "I

count upon you, and I am sure Miss Delmar counts upon you too."

Delmar bit his lip, and looked on the ground.

"I am sorry to go; I shall be sorrier still not to return. These things must often be, whether we wish it or not."

His uneasiness, his changing colour, set the young man thinking. "Yes," he said to himself, "it is as I thought. My friend is in love with that beautiful Zoë, and for some reason or other she will not listen to him, or he is obliged to be silent. He left off talking of Zoë, and talked of himself."

"What delightful hours we have spent together! They must, they shall be renewed!" he said, promptly. "There are countless topics we have talked of discussing, dozens of arguments with which I have armed myself for your discomfiture."

The other laughed aloud.

"I promise you not to cross the Atlantic without bidding you farewell; whether we shall have time for all the intellectual warfare you speak of is another matter. I daresay, if we had ample opportunity, I should convert you to Theism, or you would convert me to Rome. But, do not forget, Father Gabriel, that, wherever I may be, I am always your true friend."

"Of that I am sure," answered the monk, and so they parted.

Father Gabriel felt very lonely when he knew that his friend had really set off on his travels, and that the renewal of their afternoon talks was problematic. His joyous temperament had received a check from which he found it difficult to recover. He might make other friendships, but none could be so precious to him as this one.

"He will come back," repeated the young man to himself comfortingly; "if not for my

sake, for the woman's." In his eyes there was but one. "She will repell him. He will but seek her the more pertinaciously."

Thus his romance-reading had taught him, and during the blank days following Delmar's departure, he read his favourite writers with renewed assiduity.

In this novel-reading he was far from transgressing law or custom. Does not the great Basil inculcate the desirability of knowing profane literature? "Herein," as he says, "imitating the bees, which go to all kinds of flowers in search of honey." St. Jerome, moreover, in that well-known letter to his disciple, wherein he speaks of the "seven volumes vomited forth against Christianity by the Emperor Julian," argues in the same way. "All kinds of knowledge afford matters for argument," he says. "Not only Apuleius, therefore, but Honoré de Balzac may be turned to the glory of

God and the power of the Church." Whilst the young monk, thinking of Delmar and Zoë, was seeking to solve their riddle in such romantic parallels as the pages of Sir Walter Scott and Dickens afforded, the traveller was flying from place to place, like one trying to escape his evil destiny. The region through which he fled, with eyes that saw a blank everywhere, and thoughts ever bent towards a far-off centre, was splendid, sombre, and unique. He was travelling through that vast Dolmen land of western France which is like nothing else in the world. Here antiquity has not yet put on the garb of modern civilization. A bit of prose can hardly be found in these weird, vast landscapes, often painted in one or two cold colours, and grandiose in outline as the Scythian background of Promethean story. In some places, so thickly is the ground piled with cyclopean masses of granite that

it seems as if the very foundations of the earth had been shaken, and the dismemberment of the terrestrial globe had begun, and afterwards stopped for awhile. In others, vast plains are strewn with Titanic blocks and monoliths, which dwarf us as we gaze, and yet appear to have been as easily placed as the card temples of a child's building. Everywhere the sea is near, pale at this season, sometimes musically lapping the barren shore, gold and brown with moss and lichen, at others turbulent and majestic scaling enormous heights of frowning rock, and sending up columns of spray, with the noise of thunder, even under a clear midsummer sky.

The autumn rains set in gently here, and it would take weeks of rain-fall to wash the last gorgeousness out of heath and forest. The plaintive sound of the wind singing in the branches, the chatter of magpies on every

hedge, the crying of choughs flying overhead, the sea, whether quietly plashing on velvety sands or rushing like a deadly foe against the rocky fortresses of the coast—all harmonized with his unrestful thoughts. Sometimes a rainbow spanned the yellowing hills, and a break of the clouded sky heralded a few hours of delicious sunshine and softness, when he would hire a boat, and let himself be rowed far away between the violet and the azure, winding amid the lovely little islands within a few hours' reach of the shore, or making straight for the open sea.

And all this time there was but one thought in his mind, one name written on his heart. He could not forget Zoë. Should he flee from her, or should he go back and let destiny do with them both as it would?

He knew that he ought not to see Zoë

any more. Yet he could not make up his mind to turn his face from the old world and the new love, and set sail for America.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FOUNTAINS OF THE GREAT DEEP.

LIKE a doomed city, the city of a Hundred Bridges, now reared its stately front above the world of waters encompassing it. From the east, from the west they came, till the monotonous quick-flowing river seemed turned into an ocean, with breakers thundering on their way, dealing terror and destruction to man and beast. Then, indeed, the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened, and the waters prevailed, and were increased greatly upon the earth. For several days past the fairy-like islands in the river's mouth had been

gradually disappearing, the trees showing now a lofty summit above the engulphing tides, now a mere arrow-head, probably on the morrow to show nothing at all. Far down the river-side the panorama of pleasant gardens and country villas was undergoing the same transformation, daily and hourly diminishing to view. Standing on the highest point of the city, a weird, unimagined prospect greets the eye.

In prosperous seasons, there is no more splendid or inspiriting scene than this—the fair, wide river flowing towards the sea, war-sloops, merchant vessels, and smaller craft, crowding its ports, flags of all known nations waving here by turns; to the right, to the left, its receding banks show smiling villages and imposing châteaux, whose slated roofs and turrets and pinnacles flash in the sun, a hundred church spires crowning these, and beyond all the superb glittering sea.

But "the waters of the flood are upon the earth," and the face of everything is changed. Many a verdant landscape is hidden altogether by the relentless tides, many others are doomed to the same fate, though as yet only partially submerged; the sweeps of low-lying pasture close to the river are turned into one vast lake, the ships that hitherto lined the two miles' length of quay are gathered together in the docks and securely fastened, sprightly little steamers and pleasure boats ply their busy trade no longer, nothing breaks the solitude of the seething, raging waters but an occasional boat sent perilously to the rescue here and there. Such is the bird's eye view of things from above, but the aspect of the city as seen from its streets is still more appalling. Nothing short of a miracle can surely save it from destruction. Suburban gardens, full of roses and chrysanthemums a few days before,

are mere ponds now, in many streets, little raised bridges are already erected for pedestrians, shops, dwellings, and warehouses in exposed situations are daily and hourly emptied and abandoned, whole quarters wear the aspect of a plague-stricken place. Every day brings its appalling story of loss and ruin, and people crowd as anxiously round the newspaper and telegraph offices as in time of war. Now word is brought of hundreds of drowning cattle, now one village is reported to be submerged, now another, and many lives are sacrificed to interest or heroism. The morbidly curious pay visits to the Morgue and gaze on the livid bodies of the victims exposed there for recognition. The pious throng the churches, and pray with streaming eyes and hands uplifted towards the Virgin, or some favourite saint. The mercenary weep for the material ruin coming upon them, the gentle-hearted for

the sufferings of the poor. All is consternation, misgiving, and despair!

Zoë and Huberte, from their airy perch on the fourth story, looked upon the gathering desolation below with very different sources of alarm. To Zoë inundation meant danger to the absent Delmar, to Huberte it meant a check, it might even be a collapse to her school. The class-rooms in the lower story were on the verge of being flooded, and already the basement was covered with water.

"You do not know how much store people set by prognostics here," Huberte said, despondingly. "One piece of downright ill-luck is enough to swamp the whole concern. It is a lay-school, remember, and therefore fit object for the wrath of Heaven. We are surrounded by enemies on every side, and if we have to shift our quarters suddenly, and the business of the

classes come to a standstill, the priest will say to our girls in the confessional, 'See what comes of these ungodly schemes. You were warned before. Will you take the warning now?' The committee will be disheartened at having to pay damages. The expenses of moving backwards and forwards will be enormous. Ruin stares me in the face!"

"Nonsense," Zoë answered, winding her arms about her friend and kissing her scarlet cheeks—Huberte always crimsoned when in a state of excitement. "You look on the black side of things, my good friend. We must follow the example set us by the nuns, you know, and live on the hills, or far away from the river, where the floods cannot reach us in future."

"Who will establish us there?—who will give us houses, and gardens, and pay for private omnibuses to fetch and send home

our pupils?" Huberte continued, angry and scornful. "Oh, it is cruel to be a lay-teacher in France!"

"But if the convents have houses, and gardens, and omnibuses, they have not other things that make us strong," Zoë said. "We have the municipality with us, all the Protestants and Republicans who are rich and powerful here, and hitherto money has always been coming in when wanted. If misfortune overtake the school, its patrons will open their hearts the more."

"You cold English are never agitated," Huberte added, eyeing her friend almost vindictively. "I repeat, we are on the verge of a crisis—an hour may beggar us. Hark!"

Just then a door was heard to open and shut violently below, and loud voices and hurrying feet sounded on the staircase. There is ever a comic element in human

affairs, no matter how strongly they may be tinctured with tragedy, and so it was now. Zoë could not resist a smile at her friend's behaviour under trying circumstances. Huberte gave a start and a little shriek at hearing this commotion, but made no attempt to rise and solve the mystery. Never stirring from her chair, she awaited events, repeating the start and little shriek at every fresh piece of calamitous information. For Lise, the little maid, who loved excitement no matter whether for good or for evil, rushed in, red as a poppy, panting like a chased hare, and began as follows—

"Mademoiselle, the water has reached the foot of the staircase"—start and shriek from Huberte—"and the concierge, who is outside, says we must empty the class-rooms at once"—start and shriek—"and everybody is moving out of the street as fast as possible, and the pussy below is drowned"

—start and shriek—"and everybody says we are lost."

"We are lost!" repeated Huberte, a prey to despair. The sad fate of poor Minette moved her to tears, but a diversion was now created by the appearance of the house porter. He was in that state of semi-intoxication with which he always showed his sympathy for important events, public and private. To some women, however, the oracular response can only emanate from the other sex. Thus Huberte appealed rather to a male drunkard, and a dunderhead at best, than to sensible women sober.

Things were looking as bad as could be, said the oracle; the lower part of the house must be emptied at once, and the classes held elsewhere, Huberte listening with profound respect.

"Do as you will—I am good for nothing,"



was all she could say; whereupon Zoë interposed and besought her to rouse herself.

"Let me go and see some members of the committee, whilst Lise stays to look after you. It is early in the day; we should certainly hear what our friends advise."

"Yes, Zoë, you are right. Wait a little," Huberte said to her winking oracle. "Mademoiselle Zoë will go in one direction, I will take another. We are sure to find somebody at home, and I am in duty bound to be guided by the committee."

Huberte at last put on bonnet and shawl, and descended to the street, with Zoë emulating her high spirit. A glance convinced them how rapid had been the encroachment of the river since yesterday; then only a few planks, by way of precaution, were necessary in the courtyard; now the water stood several inches deep in every part. The house was in terribly close proximity

to the river, and on emerging into the street, they found that light wooden bridges were being put up here and there for the convenience of foot-passengers. Outside the doorway they parted, Huberte being bound to the Préfecture, Zoë to the Mairie, which were not far apart, only approached by different ways.

Zoë took a narrow, antique street, one of the few last relics of the mediæval city. Jutting gables of dark-stained wood, wide portals, with quaintly-designed roofs, deep casements, often surmounted with grotesque figures, all these were here, though daily threatened by unmerciful innovations. Most picturesque, gloomy, and Moorishly secluded are such old French streets, nowhere seen to better advantage than in the City of a Hundred Bridges. Like solemn old quartoes, bound in indestructible leather and gold, placed beside the gaudy volumes of a

circulating library, they gain in dignity by contrast with the florid, brand-new architecture around. People were hurrying to and fro in every direction, with but one cry in every mouth—

"The inundation! the inundation!"

Zoë made her way as best she could to the Mairie, where the excitement and crowd culminated. It was with no little difficulty that she managed to get up the broad flight of steps leading to the public offices, and but for the honour paid to youth and beauty in France, would most likely have waited long, and perhaps come away at last with her errand unaccomplished.

But a sweet-faced young woman, daintily dressed, and having an inexpressible look of beseechingness in her eyes, a delicate rose-tint on her cheek, and abundance of distractingly pretty hair, is ever a royalty on French soil.

So, amid the importuning suppliants on every side, country curés and mayors from far-off villages, peasant farmers in the quaint costumes of their district, nuns, soldiers and sailors, each bound on some pitiful errand, Zoë was singled out for a first hearing.

An adjoint, in other words, that important personage, an alderman, now came forward, and promised to send a clerk to advise and aid Mademoiselle Huberte Denis without delay. The school, being under municipal patronage, was of course a matter of municipal concern. Every possible aid should be afforded.

Then she was handed over to the care of a withered, grey-haired, automaton-like sergent de ville, who, in spite of his hard exterior, had as keen an eye to feminine charms as any Parisian dandy. Charged with seeing her safely through the crowd, he walked pompously in advance, elbowing,

threatening, and driving back the throng with quiet, unbecoming acrimony, turning round at every instant to smile encouragingly at his sweet companion, and saying to himself that for years he had not seen such lovely eyes, lifting his hat in stately salute as he quitted her at the gateway.

It seemed as if all the world were bound to the Mairie. The chief press of the multitude had been within the gateway, but from every side multitudes were hurrying in this direction, bent on business, or reading the telegrams hourly arriving from all parts, and conspicuously displayed for the public benefit. Zoë paused to read with the rest. The statistics and figures did not convey much meaning to her, but after these followed one calamitous piece of information on the heels of another. Dwellings, granaries, crops, farm implements, poultry, cattle, horses,

human beings—the ravenous, the revolutionary river seemed bent on engulphing all!

Her eyes moved quickly from one line to another, till suddenly they were arrested, fascinated, transfixed. She turned poppy-red, then pale as elder-bloom. Her knees trembled under her, her brain reeled, she leaned on the wall for support.

"Last telegram," she read. "River rising rapidly below the Pointe de Gare. Drowned body of a foreigner washed ashore on the Île de la Fadette. Supposed to be that of an English tourist."

A terrible fear took possession of her. The tourist season was over in these parts. Delmar was venturesome, nay, reckless. Nothing was likelier than that rash curiosity on his part had ended thus.

She read and re-read, trying to re-assure herself. After all, how many Englishmen came to Les Ponts at all seasons of the year

on business! Delmar was less likely to be exposed to danger than one of these. Yes, she was tormenting herself with an irrational, childish fear. She had fulfilled Huberte's behest, and quickly deciding what to do, set off in the direction of the Morgue. She felt brave enough to look on death, but she must know whether he was among the living or the dead. The ghastly spectacle, however, inside the dead-house was spared her. On telling her errand at the doorway she was informed that the body of her supposed countryman had not yet been fetched from the island, and that most probably a boat was on the point of starting thither at that very moment. With incredible speed she made her way to the river-side; she knew by heart the name of every quay small and great, and exactly where to find the especial one from which boats started for the Île de la Fadette. Many

and many a time she had embarked thence with Delmar, and steaming down the glorious river, had alighted now on this verdant little Paradise, now on that, to spend a few golden hours of contentment and liberty.

To-day the aspect of the river suggested the reverse of holiday enjoyment. The cheerful little traffic boats no longer plied between the port and the islands, the harbour's mouth bristled with the masts and chimneys of countless vessels, securely moored, whilst the invading waters were almost up to the key-stone of the bridge. Where before barges piled high with cargo and little sailing boats had passed easily, could now be seen only a few inches of sky between water and spanning arch.

A boat was about to put off just as Zoë reached the spot, and having breathlessly begged for a place, she prepared to step in.

"It is not possible," said the boatman,

putting his oar between the dainty foot and the boat's edge. "The gentleman yonder will explain."

He was a swarthy-skinned, rough-looking man, who thought women in Zoë's condition of life good only for gilded salons. Her generally cared for appearance and gentle looks grated upon him just then; most likely, had she been a woman of his own class, no matter how old or how ugly, the desired place would have been accorded. But a delicately nurtured, almost elegant young woman, with a lovely face and a small foot, had clearly no business here.

"The gentleman yonder" was a sergent de ville, to whom poor Zoë now turned with flushed cheeks and streaming eyes.

"I must go," she said, piteously. "Do let me have a place. I am not afraid."

"It is a dead body we are going to fetch, and may be we shall have more than one

to bring back," urged the Cerberus, gruffly.

"But," Zoë pleaded, turning from one to the other with unmistakable meaning in her face and voice, "it may be my kinsman who lies dead there. We are both strangers here, and there is no one to bury him, if indeed he is drowned, but me."

In such cases a Frenchman never thinks of money. The sergent de ville shrugged his shoulders, and held out his hand to help her into the boat. The boatman let them have their way with dogged submission. He did not chuckle to himself at the thought of the guerdon awaiting him. He merely uttered a secret oath, and summed up matters as the police officer had done just before. Women and Love rule the world. Eyeing her morosely from time to time, yet having had care for her comfort at starting, he now plied his oars without a word. It was terrible work.

Once fairly out of the docks, the turmoil and movement of the river was like a stormy sea. The musical little waves on which rowing a boat or paddling a canoe was habitually child's play, were exchanged for long, far-reaching breakers, crested with foam and thundering as they went. Zoë watched her Cerberus and his companion compassionately, and felt in her purse for two little gold pieces to reward such Herculean labour. A strong wind blew in their faces, they had to make head against an eddying current, and the murky sky dropped gusts of rain from time to time. Soon their bronzed faces showed an under hue of crimson, and large drops of perspiration dropped from their steaming brows. If ever toil deserved ample reward it was theirs.

In spite of the unfamiliar fear knocking at her heart, Zoë could not help taking in

every feature of the unparalleled scene. All around them rolled the world of waters, the overcharged heavens betokened torrents of rain yet to come, whilst on every side were seen tree-tops, house-roofs, and church spires, just rising above the flooded lands. The smaller islands and vast stretches of low-lying pasture were already engulphed, and the water was rising with tremendous rapidity. Looking back upon the grand old city crowning universal ruins, Zoë felt as if, even there, safety might be problematic now. A second deluge seemed to menace the earth.

Only one or two boats, bent upon some perilous errand of charity or self-devotion, broke the monotony of the watery wastes. There were poor people still awaiting rescue in many places, in spite of the strenuous efforts in the cause of public safety that had been made all day. No other craft ventured afloat.

As they neared the Île de la Fadette, Zoë saw that the place was hardly now recognizable. Its dimpled hillocks, lawny glades, and smiling gardens had all vanished; nothing remained visible but the summits of the poplars and the upper stories of the farm-house, its sole habitation. A cluster of people, awaiting their deliverance, stood on the landing-place—three or four peasant women, with children in their arms, an aged peasant, a man in civilian's dress, and a Franciscan brother.

CHAPTER XII.

FOR LIFE AND LOVE.

ON arriving within earshot of the landing-place, an indescribable scene took place. The delirium of joy and gratitude with which the poor panic-stricken women had first hailed the boat, was changed into a Mænad-like fury when a stentorian voice was heard above all, crying,

"Bring out the dead body!"

Zoë hid her face in her hands that she might not witness the struggle, but a blind man must have guessed what was going on. The men had retired to fetch the body from within, whereupon the women—wo-

men, indeed, no longer, but tigresses fighting for their young, made a desperate effort to get into the boat. High above the turmoil of wind and waves, sounded their yells, shrieks, and curses, and the wailing of the children, whilst the sole response was a reiterated,

"Bring out the dead body!"

"Leave the dead and save the living," cried one hitherto gentle-eyed woman, with a suckling at her breast. "Do you see the storm coming on? If we are left here all night we are lost. Our dying curses will trouble your soul in hell—Vampire!"

"What does he care for curses?" said another, with a cynical, clever face. "One dead bourgeois is worth a dozen living peasant folks like us!"

"Ay, that is it," cried the third, a good-tempered, unreflective soul, who, under ordinary circumstances, never drowned a

kitten without tears; "we women, with babes at the breast, may drown by the dozen, so long as a mincing girl can pay handsomely for the freight of her dead lover." And saying this, she clenched her fist and gnashed her teeth at Zoë's bowed head.

Just then the men emerged from an upper room, bearing their ghastly burden, and a second conflict took place. Zoë did not dare to look up. She sat cold and still, whilst the boat violently swayed backwards and forwards, with the frantic attempts of the women to secure a place. The cries, the imprecations, the hand-to-hand struggle were demoniacal. One moment she thought that all was lost, and that the boat had upset; the next, she heard a violent thud, and, drawing a long breath, she looked up.

But it was a living face she saw now, a warm palm pressed her own, a familiar

voice called her by name. There, standing opposite to her, screening her from the dead, looking down upon her with the tenderest concern, stood Delmar.

She was on her feet in a moment, and a look, a word explained all. Whom else had she come to seek?—what else but love should send her on such a quest? She thought he was drowned, she said, shedding happy tears, clinging to him with foolish joy. Nothing mattered, now that he was safe, and they were together!

By tacit understanding, he lifted her out of the boat, making way for the poor, thankful, astounded women. "It is just; we are mothers," they said, and that was all their thanks.

"You have room for these women and children," Delmar said, handing the men some little gold pieces. "If you make the best of your way home, you can despatch

a boat for us before the storm breaks. Whoever comes will be well paid."

The older man nodded; he was indifferent to social distinctions when life and death were concerned, and in the first instance had kept back the women from a sense of justice. He was sent by the town authorities to fetch the dead body, and the rest must take their chance. Zoë, it seemed to him, had clearly a right to the second place, but to take all was impossible. People must settle such matters between them.

There were, however, two more passengers, the aged peasant and the Capucin brother, the former hovering close to the boat's edge with that greediness after life and safety so natural in old age, the latter standing apart, praying over his breviary. Which of the two should be taken, and which left behind?

On the question being put to him, the

monk shrugged his shoulders, and shook his head, whereupon the old man jumped in with alacrity, and the boat moved off.

Zoë, still clinging to Delmar's arm, watched its difficult progress shudderingly. The river did with its frail burden as it willed; on those mighty currents it was swayed, now this way, now that, at every moment apparently in the utmost jeopardy.

"Is there danger?" she asked.

"Not for them; there may be a little for us, unless they keep their promise," he answered, coolly. "The weather grows uglier every moment, and what with the rise of the river, and the torrents of rain to come, I should not like to spend the night here much. But do you not know"—and here he dropped his voice to a lower key—"that monk yonder is our friend, Father Gabriel? Speak to him."

"Father Gabriel!—how came he here? And you, too!—tell me that first."

"Oh, for myself, I am but paying the penalty of national curiosity. I had never seen an inundation in my life, and having returned to Les Ponts yesterday, steamed at once up the river as far as the light-house; there I met Father Gabriel, who had been collecting alms thereabouts."

They moved towards him, and Zoë greeted him with her accustomed cordiality, but he had the merest makeshift of a smile to offer her, and only a few formal words. She forgot that such a change of manner was only to be expected, and that, whilst in Delmar's study or Mrs. O'Meara's drawing-room, she encountered the friend, the man; here the monk, the recluse, only stood before her. After replying to their queries briefly and coldly, he withdrew

apart, and again absorbed himself in his prayers.

Delmar as well as Zoë understood his behaviour. What to them might mean a strange combination of circumstances and rare phenomena, only perhaps portended to this fellow-traveller a visitation of "that vindictive anger of God" he often mentioned so solemnly. He might see in these perils and mischances something far beyond accident and the play of fortune, something sent to punish him for sin, some especial ordinance of Heaven ordained for his soul's good. They moved away silently and respectfully.

"Let us inspect our ark," Delmar said, leading her indoors. They had hitherto remained on the running gallery or balcony often found in French country houses of the rustic sort, the upper stories communicating with the lower only from a staircase without. Following her guide, Zoë now found a

long bare room, from which most of the furniture had been removed, but which possessed at least a fireplace, a few kitchen utensils, some bedding, and a table.

"We can at least make a fire," Delmar said, smiling, "and cook our dinner, if, indeed, they have left us anything to eat."

Zoë looked at him with large, dismayed eyes.

"You do not suppose they will leave us here all night?" she asked, suddenly roused to a sense of the situation. What would Huberte say? What would be thought of her? A natural blush dyed her cheeks, and her heart beat quickly.

"If we are left till the morning it will be nobody's fault," he answered, quite coolly, and peering hither and thither. "Hundreds of folks are in a worse plight than ourselves. Look here!"

He triumphantly pointed to a barrel of

flour, some vegetables in a sack, a little barrel of wine, and a flitch of bacon; all these things had been evidently collected for removal, and at the last moment thrust at random on to the attic stair-head, as offering a chance of safety.

"Come upstairs," he said, and she followed him, both bending their heads under the low rafters. The attic was not an inviting place, smelling of rotten apples, mice, mouldy cheese, and fishing-nets. If the worst came to the worst, it might offer a harbour of refuge, but for the present the kitchen below was comparatively comfortable.

Then they went on to the balcony again, to watch for their deliverers. Delmar used his telescope scientifically, but nothing could be seen, for the world of waters encompassing them on every side. A blinding rain had set in, blotting out the distant view of

city, docks, and suburban villages. The wind raged with fearful violence. All was desolation, tumult, and gathering darkness.

"It is a waste of time to wait here; till this hurricane abates, it is impossible for a boat to get out so far," he said. "Come indoors, Zoë, and let me make you a fire, whilst you shall prepare the dinner. When our preparations are done, we will summon Father Gabriel to partake."

They set to work with alacrity, and soon a cheery fire crackled on the hearth. Zoë prepared a vegetable soup, whilst Delmar turned back his sleeves, and made some buckwheat cakes, after squatter fashion, baking them skilfully in the wood ashes. The result of their combined labours was satisfactory. Then the table was cleared, and the process of laying the cloth gone through. It was impossible not to forget the discomfort and perils of their position

whilst so occupied. Constraint, much less embarrassment, was impossible under these unique circumstances.

The wind and waters roared around with deafening commotion, the sky every moment grew more and more darkly ominous, the rain beat furiously upon every side of their frail tenement, yet they could not choose but smile and jest over their tasks.

When the finishing touch was put to the repast, Zoë despatched Delmar in search of their companion; but after a few minutes he returned alone. Finger on lip, he led her to the door, and pointed which way she was to look.

There, bare-headed to the storm, stood the young monk, like one rapt, illumined, beatified. His face was lifted heavenwards with a look of mingled awe and ecstasy, his lips were parted in inarticulate prayer, his whole bearing was that of one who believes

himself in direct communion with the Unseen.

They watched him for a minute in silence, then re-entered, both in a graver mood; Delmar shut the door carefully, put another log on the fire, made a gesture of dissatisfaction, and the two sat down without a word. At last he said,

"Our friend will perhaps eat a crust and drink when we have finished. He is making himself rheumatic for life; but it cannot be helped.

"Shall I try to persuade him?" Zoë cried, full of womanly concern. And she rose, but Delmar put out his hand and drew her to her seat.

"It is useless. He might feel himself in a dilemma. We cannot tell what religious, or, at least, what doctrinal motives induce him to behave in this strange fashion. Doubtless the whole misadventure ap-

pears to him in the light of a divine dispensation."

They ate and drank silently; he, noting Zoë pale cheeks, rose from his seat, and pouring out a cup of wine, held it to her lips. She was, in truth, both tired and spiritless, and the monk's behaviour affected her as an evil omen. But for his sake, she tried to be cheerful. He did all the talking.

"Come, Zoë," he said, "let us forget Father Gabriel for a time, and when we have dined, he will come in and be comforted. What excellent fare! Do eat and drink, my dear child, to keep me in countenance."

The familiar appellative, though natural and pardonable in a kinsman, alike pleased and troubled her. More than once during that memorable dinner, her eyes drop-

ped under his glance, and she blushed crimson.

"Now," he added, briskly, when they had done, "arrange the table for our hermit, and whilst Father Gabriel eats, we must lose ourselves in meditation, or keep watch aloft."

The brief twilight was over, and night had fairly set in, when the monk was at last prevailed upon to come indoors and eat. This he did silently and mechanically, never opening his lips, never raising his eyes from his plate. His aspect was one of profound dejection, and Zoë and Delmar could but feel that their lightest words must jar on such a mood. They sat opposite to each other, speaking rarely and only of the storm, which raged with increasing violence.

"Will the boat come now?" she asked, not terror-stricken, only dismayed.

"Impossible," was the reply, and as she glanced at her companion's face in the fire-light, it wore, to her thinking, no look of alarm at the thought.



CHAPTER XIII.

DEATH OR LIFE?

BUT the storm had not as yet manifested itself in its full majesty. All that had happened hitherto was a mere prelude of its wonder-working to come. In such crises moments are eventful, and during the short time devoted by the monk to his meal, the wind and water had raged with increased fury. When, having finished, and uttered a benediction, he incautiously opened the door, the room was flooded. Delmar sprang from his chair in frantic haste, closed and bolted the door, barricaded the window with anything he could lay hands on; then,

Zoë helping, he sponged up the water. The next business was to hit upon a contrivance for keeping up the fire, which at every instant was brought to the lowest ebb with the sputtering raindrops.

Soon a new source of uneasiness became apparent. Zoë on a sudden felt something cold moisten her forehead, and looking up, they saw that the water was slowly oozing through the ceiling in several places. The gentle dripping was quickly changed for a shower, and there was no time to lose. Delmar bade Zoë follow him to the attic, and by the light of a lantern they now worked zealously, not to keep out the enemy—that was impossible—but to set traps for him. Every available utensil was put in requisition under the leaking roof—wine-barrels, cider-vats, milk-pails; then they stuffed up crevices and crannies with sacking, bedding, old fishing-nets; lastly,

Delmar made a scrutiny of the place, nailing up a board here, a piece of sail-cloth there, whilst Zoë held the lantern. These precautions being taken, nothing remained but to resign themselves to the situation.

The fire now blazed cheerily, and they sat down beside it, this time not apart, Delmar taking his place by Zoë, the monk seating himself opposite. The seats had been placed by the wall for the sake of comfort, and all three leaned back, Zoë wearied in body and mind, Delmar preoccupied, Father Gabriel with upturned face and clasped hands, as if in prayer.

Thus some time passed, and Zoë had dozed a little, resting her head in the angle formed by the projecting mantelpiece, when she was aroused by an unearthly commotion. The beams and rafters creaked as of a ship foundering at sea, the crockery on the kitchen shelf was hurled to the floor, and

shattered into fragments, the house rocking, and a noise as of imminent thunder filled the place.

It was the hurricane, now raging in full fury over their heads, threatening them every moment with destruction.

All three rose to their feet, and looked at each other silently. There was no denying it—they were in jeopardy of their lives.

"We can do nothing?" Zoë asked.

She was a brave woman, but as she realised the full peril of the position, her voice faltered, and she put her hand on Delmar's arm with childish appeal.

"Nothing," was the calm answer, and the cold little hand was taken between his own —"nothing."

"My brother, my sweet sister," broke in the clear voice of the Capucin, reproachfully, "do you say this? Nothing? We can at least pray for ourselves,

for each other, and for all in like danger."

Zoë and Delmar bowed their heads; still standing with outstretched hands, the young man recited solemnly, and with introductory adjuration of the Virgin and his patron saint, one Latin canticle after another. Any form of prayer, under the circumstances, would have been impressive; but whilst he prayed, Zoë's thoughts wandered to her childhood's home and buried kinsfolk in England, and Delmar's naturally went back to old days and old loves, both asking Divine forgiveness, in that portentous moment, of aught they had done amiss.

The monk uttered a priestly blessing and then ceased. Amid the din as of a world going to pieces, and a hundred thousand evil spirits yelling triumphantly over its destruction, they then resumed their seats. Every moment they expected the roof to overwhelm, or the waters to engulph them.

It seemed, indeed, as if only a miracle could save them from the danger threatening on every side. If one of Delmar's barriers gave way, they were hopelessly drowned; if one especial gust singled out their frail tenement for assault, they were inevitably buried under its ruins, or they might, at any moment, be flooded with waters from above. And they could do nothing! Outside was the pitchy blackness of the night, the all-devouring river, the all-ravaging hurricane, the pitiless, driving, beating rain; their chances of safety, such as they were, lay within, and every moment the tempest was diminishing these.

Not one of the three looked for deliverance just then. Being familiar with the awful reputation of the river, they could but prepare themselves for a calamity but too common in these regions. Zoë and Delmar trembled, but not with fear. A

momentary pause followed a tremendous hurtling of winds and waves, and during the pause Delmar whispered in her ear,

"If we are rescued, will you follow me to the world's end? I will procure a divorce. I shall be free to make you my wife."

Zoë answered, never raising her eyes,

"I will."

Again he bent forward, and whispered eagerly,

"But I must at once set sail to America. Go with me. There is no time to lose. All must be decided to-morrow."

What could Zoë say? and thinking was no longer possible. She promised. It seemed so easy to make rash promises just then when they were in peril of their lives; and no sooner had the murmured affirmation passed her pale lips than the storm burst forth with redoubled fury. In silence all three awaited

their fate, the young monk observing his companions narrowly. He noticed that, when the crashing of the wind was more than usually portentous, and the combination of the wind and waters unearthly, he said aloud,

"At least, we shall die together."

Zoë answered aloud also, both utterly unconscious of his presence,

"I am not afraid."

The monk pondered. His first feeling of panic was over, and he now resigned himself to the worst. He had prayed, he had made every spiritual preparation possible under the circumstances; all that now remained was to put away horrifying thoughts, and assume an aspect of cheerfulness. That image of death so suddenly put before him was terribly unwelcome. To a nature like his it could but be so. He hoped such bright things of life, and as yet but stood on its threshold!

Even his intense religious fervour could not bring him to contemplate a speedy dissolution resignedly. For religion, as he thought, most of all for faith, for godly work, and for the Church, he craved to live.

So just then his curiosity about his companions and their behaviour whilst passing through the same ordeal, arose out of self-defence. He wanted to forget himself, to lose consciousness of that individuality which had become so burdensome, to speculate upon any subject rather than the nature of the dread change called Death, the plunge from the agreeable and familiar into the dark and the unknown. He sat opposite to his companions, scrutinising them narrowly, and by little and little light dawned upon his understanding.

The young man, in presence of these silent lovers, felt himself strangely moved. His first feeling was that of compassionate su-

periority, nay, of contempt. He, at least, was free from those tormenting joys, those delicious pangs; his career, at least, would never be shipwrecked by the smiles or frowns of a woman! The emotion now stirring Delmar could never unman him. Heaven had shielded him from that greatest of all spiritual perils, that worst of all mortal evils, the snare of beauty. He smiled inwardly, too, as he now unriddled for himself the oddness of Delmar's recent conduct; all became clear as day, read by the new light thus thrown upon it.

But after awhile this self-satisfied mood passed, and a strange perturbation usurped its place. Was it a nightmare? Was it the hallucination of a disordered fancy? Was it the devil tempting him? He knew not, he could only tremble and pray.

The outward aspect of things had somewhat changed. By almost imperceptible

degrees the wild temper of the storm was allayed, the roar of the winds diminished, the hail-storm exchanged for steady but noiseless rain, the cracking of rafters and beams silenced altogether. For the present danger seemed over.

Zoë, meantime, partly out of sheer bodily weariness, partly from a desire to escape further emotion, had taken refuge in a feigned dose. The pretence of sleep induced the reality. Overcome at last by irrepressible drowsiness, she took off her hat, loosened her abundant hair, and making a pillow of her arm, slumbered for a while uncomfortably. Rising with an ejaculation of impatience, to try to place herself in an easier position, her comb escaped, letting down the glorious gold-brown locks on her shoulders.

That bright hair, seen by the flickering firelight, made a brightness in the place, magnet-

izing other eyes besides Delmar's. The monk gazed and gazed, all kinds of new thoughts stirring within him. Zoë had moved her head, turning it slightly upward, and nothing could be fairer to look upon than the face of the sleeping girl then. Awe, rapture, terror, warred alternately in the heart of the young recluse. At one moment he felt uncontrollable jealousy of Delmar, at another profoundest pity for him. Now he was fain himself to fall at Zoë's feet in adoration, now he was ready to turn away in self-abomination and horror.

Meantime Delmar slept, his head resting on the wall, his hands folded on his knees; but no sleep came to the monk. The young man prayed earnestly to be rid of his distracting, nay, ungodly thoughts. He averted his head, he buried his face in his mantle, to no purpose. The beauty of the

sleeping girl, the ripple of her gold-brown hair, could not be thus hidden.

Why was it that he had never himself fully realized Zoë's loveliness till now? Before it he felt subjected, enthralled, as if indeed his boyish peace was gone for ever.

Thus he mused as he kept his anxious vigil, now covering his face to hide the bitter tears, now striving to pray, but finding no words, now contemplating the vision before him with the dangerous excuse, "For the last time!"

CHAPTER XIV.

RESCUED.

AT daybreak Delmar and the monk, mounting to the upper story, gazed at the strange scene around—a waste of waters, with just enough of dimpling green here and there to betoken the verdant world hidden underneath. The hurricane was over, but a tremendous wind still blew from the west, and the swollen river roared on every side like an angry sea. They were as completely isolated as shipwrecked mariners clinging to a spar in mid-ocean; but help was near at hand.

"I see a boat making for us, and several

others are starting from the quay, doubtless in quest of others storm-bound like ourselves," Delmar said, looking through a telescope. "Well, thank God, we are spared. There was a moment last night when I gave up everything for lost."

"And I also," replied the monk. "The lesson is doubtless sent to us as a divine dispensation——"

He was here interrupted by the light touch of a slender hand on his arm, and looking up, beheld Zoë, a glowing apparition of life, grace, and beauty.

"Will you not break your fast with us?" she asked, easily, as if she were doing the honours of Mrs. O'Meara's drawing-room. "You supped but ill last night. Pray do not refuse."

The last words were uttered with womanly insinuation, Zoë for the first time noticing that their friend looked more than weary.

He was pale to haggardness, his eyes had a feverish lustre, his hands trembled violently. The thought struck her that perhaps he entertained some scruple about eating with them under the circumstances. There might be a monastic law he feared to infringe, she reflected, adding aloud in the kindest tone,

"Or would you like me to bring you a cup of coffee?" She took his strange silence to mean consent, and descended, a minute or two later appearing with the coffee.

The monk watched her, not yet trusting himself to speak. Such a service as this she might have performed for the veriest stranger, words as kind she might have uttered to the beggar at her door, yet both action and speech staggered him. Oh! why was she so fair? Why was she so kind?

She, having deposited her burden, was about to go when he stammered out a few words of inarticulate thanks, and as she smiled encouragingly at him, she saw that his eyes were full of tears.

"Can I do anything more for you?" she asked, with kindly concern; his agitation grieved rather than perplexed her.

"Pray for me, my sister," he said, in the saddest tone; then seeing that he had no more to say, she rejoined Delmar below. The two broke their fast silently, Zoë's colour coming and going, he no calmer than herself. He knew that in a few minutes the boat would arrive, and that the time for a final explanation had come. He led up to the subject nervously.

"Something must have happened to our friend," he said, "he is strangely agitated this morning. Perhaps he dreads the criticism that may be passed on his misadventure,

but the dilemma has not been of our own making."

Zoë reddened to the temples.

"Huberte is sure to be very angry with me," she said.

"What right has Huberte to be angry? No one is responsible for hurricanes, and when you set out yesterday there seemed a hundred chances to one in favour of your speedy return. She must see this."

He went on, with lover-like sophistry, from argument to argument, but Zoë sat, with bowed head, in speechless indecision. The boat was now within earshot; in a minute or two more they would no longer be alone. He stood beside her, and said, desperately,

"You will keep your promise to me?"

"I do not know," she faltered, with blushing cheeks and glistening eyes. "I

was taken unawares. Give me time to reflect."

"Can you not trust me?" he added, in breathless haste. "Those chains I told you of shall be broken. I shall be free to make you my wife."

She had not a word to say. He had paralysed her will. It seemed to her that she was no longer herself—as if, indeed, she had no longer an individuality.

"Dear Zoë," again he urged, "do not hesitate—do not mistrust me. I will explain everything, but I must set sail at once, and if I leave you behind, you will waver—you will allow yourself to be influenced against me. And you have promised!"

Still she said not a word. There was only a minute more, and a last time he pleaded in his own behalf.

"What is there to hold you back? Surely

no one who loves you as I do? Yes, you will keep your promise, I know."

There was only time for another word or two. Immediately after, their names were called from without, and entering the boat, they were rowed back to the city in company with several others picked up here and there. On arriving at the quay, about half a score of persons, whose fate had been hitherto uncertain, found themselves in the arms of friends and relations. Taking advantage of the general commotion, the three separated, each going their different way.

Never did city present a more woeful appearance than the City of Bridges after that memorable—one might almost say historic—hurricane. The wind had stripped it of head-covering—literally scalped it from one end to the other—and the shattered slates and roofing-tiles lay on the pavement like

fallen leaves in autumn. People were rushing hither and thither, with one frantic cry on every lip—"*Les couvreurs! les couvreurs!*"—the tilers, the tilers!—literally, the coverers, a word, doubtless, coined expressly after some such calamity in former days. But the wind still blew fearfully, and heroic tilers, willing to scale the roofs of six-storied houses at the peril of their lives, without prospect of guerdon or glory, did not offer themselves by thousands. Nor was the progress of the dreaded inundation stayed, so that in the distance loomed a far more terrible catastrophe still. Scared and pallid-faced folks were running in all directions, too full of their own concerns to pay much heed to their friends and neighbours.

The prevailing tumult was the greatest piece of good luck that could possibly have befallen Zoë. She found Huberte much excited, and in such a mood as only to take

in her friend's narrative parcel-wise. As to the sleeping on an island, had not the night been strangely passed by everyone? Most people had been thankful to sleep anywhere, and some had not closed their eyes at all. Neither she nor Lise had retired till long after midnight. All kinds of romantic incidents had happened. The world, to Huberte's thinking, was turned upside-down, and, as is usually the case, a light thread of comedy was interwoven with the sober tissue of tragic gloom.

"Would you believe it?" she said, flaming poppy-red, and putting her arm coyly round her friend's waist, whispered—"I have an unknown admirer. Last night my hand was caught and kissed in the dark."

She drew herself up, and continued, in a haughty voice—Huberte had one voice for speaking of her own sex, and one for speaking of the other—

"You know how much I dislike men, as a rule—their detestable vanity and falseness, their flattering ways, their want of morality —but this is no piece of meaningless impertinence, I feel sure of it. Were it indeed so, I should never be able to hold up my head again. There was a beard—but I will tell you all from the beginning. The hurricane came on quite suddenly, and Lise and I, not daring to go to bed, lest the ceiling should fall in, rushed downstairs, she taking the back way, I the front. The wind had blown out the stair lights, and I was groping my way downstairs as best I could, when I heard a gentle footstep, a sigh, and all in a moment my hand was caught and kissed by a Beard; I screamed violently, and getting free, hastened on, stumbling against Madame Roberts' door. Lights were brought, but the Beard was gone!"

"Dear Huberte," Zoë said, "it was,

perhaps, Monsieur Papotte, the drawing-master, coming to see if he could be of use to you. I am sure he admires you greatly."

Huberte shook her head.

"It is a mystery, a romance, and most likely will ever remain so. Such things are."

But there was no time to sentimentalise. Zoë had some lessons to give in one of her convents; Huberte had a class in their damp quarters, and the rest of the day was laboriously spent in preparing for the worst. No one could tell what misfortunes were yet in store. The hurricane had, indeed, passed over, but if the rain set in again, terrible damage must be done to all kinds of property. Hardly one roof in an entire street was made water-tight. Workmen were systematically engaged for the purpose of mopping up the water in attics and upper stories. Preparations were made

for the bad weather as for an invading army.

"I think the world is coming to an end, what with one thing and another," Huberte said, as she lay down by her friend's side on beds placed in their little drawing-room, Lise, the maid, already snoring near. Huberte also was soon fast asleep, doubtless dreaming of the Beard. Only Zoë, in spite of weariness, kept uneasy vigils till a late hour. She had promised to meet Delmar next day at the little railway-station, from which they had started for their seaside holiday a few weeks before.

"We will take a boat to a port lower down on the Bay of Biscay, where we are sure to find a steamer starting for Bordeaux," he had whispered at parting.

Did he know what he was asking? Did she realise what she was promising? It was just her whole life, nothing less, nothing

more. She trusted him, she never doubted in the constancy of her own affection. Yet she shrank back.

The notion of breaking her troth to him did not once cross her mind. The promise, if for no better reason than because it was a promise, must be kept. But by some unaccountable transformation that promise wore a wholly different aspect since yesterday. Then it had been the solution of a problem. Now a dozen new problems seemed implicated in that one. She had said to herself,

What is my life worth except to him? Now the question arose in her mind—Is it so? Is not my life worth something to me apart from all others, and even from his? Have I not a certain self, an individuality as before? Am I not always Zoë? She alternately doubted and believed in him.

Thus coldly she reasoned and tormented

herself with misgivings which a word, a look from him would, perhaps, have allayed: For the first time it dawned upon her that he was tempting her to surrender her conscience, and that, having done this, he would be made master of the moral world as far as it concerned herself. Right and wrong would cease to exist for her, except measured by his standard. By his Yea or Nay all things must henceforth be computed, weighed, and meted out.

CHAPTER XV.

ON THE VERGE.

THE dawn was bright, calm, and tender, with blue breaks in the clearing heavens, and a gentle west wind ruffling the surface of the swollen river. People looked at the unburdened sky and quieter tide with gathering courage. For the present, danger seemed to have passed away.

Huberte roused her companion, crying—"The Beard, The Beard!" and recounted one romantic dream after another in the gayest humour. As the two sat over their coffee, the usually stern, misanthropic Hu-

berte unveiled to Zoë all kinds of feminine fancies.

"You will set me down as a child—most likely a fool," she said, "but I feel convinced that the mystery of last night will be some day cleared up. You know I am by nature a man-hater, and that in my pretty days I refused a marriage proposed to me by my parents because the suitor was not to my taste. But I confess it was never my wish to die a spinster. There is an impolite French proverb, which is the epitaph of many a single woman, and I should not like it to be applied to me—'Une cruche cassée, une demoiselle morte,' meaning, of course, that the breaking of a jug and the death of an old maid are events of about equal importance."

Zoë laughed, and said, a little drily,

"Harder sayings than that will not disturb us in our graves."

"But do tell me, my dear, will this adventure of yours get into the newspapers, do you think? Will people know that you spent the night on an island with no other companion but two men, and one a monk, too? It is a terrible complication."

"We stayed because the poor women were almost fighting for places, and there was not room for all," Zoë answered, with quiet dignity. "You would have done the same. And we hoped that a boat might be sent back immediately."

"True; and people's minds are too much occupied with their own affairs just now to trouble themselves about scandal. Yes, the affair may blow over. But it is useless to try to deceive me. Monsieur Delmar is in love with you. He will take you some day to America."

She would have questioned further, but

the chiming of the church clock told her that she must go.

"Well, you will tell me the rest of your story at dinner time," she said. "I breakfast out to-day, and we shall both have more than enough to do till then. Adieu."

Poor Zoë heard the door close on her friend with the strangest mixture of heart-sinking and elation. She wished to throw her arms around Huberte, and tell her all, but she wished, for Delmar's sake, to be silent. So she had turned away her face when Huberte looked back, smiling and nodding, feeling all the time the veriest traitress under the sun.

When making that promise yesterday, nothing seemed easier than to carry it out. She would merely put together a few necessaries for her journey, and walk out of the house, leaving all explanations to be

made by letter afterwards. In those first moments of exultation the implied sacrifice on her part seemed trifling. But now the consequences of it had swelled into paramount importance. What would her kindly employer think of her? Would not Huberte suffer through her conduct? Such a lapse must inevitably drag down others as well as herself. She was not a mere social unit after all. Still she never swerved from her desperate resolve, and seeing that only two hours remained before the appointed meeting, she shut herself in her room, and set about the necessary preparations. Most women retain throughout their lives that kind of fetichism which distinguishes the girl-child from the boy. Just as a three-year-old maiden will hug her doll as if it were a veritable piece of flesh and blood, so in later years she lends warmth and vitality to certain beloved trinkets and be-

longings, looking upon them as parts of her existence, sympathetic as well as adorable.

When Zoë glanced round her pretty room, and opened one drawer after another with the thought—"What of the old life shall I carry with me into the new?" she felt a sinking of the heart, and a welling up of tears in her throat. Such cherished little surroundings as the picture of her childhood's home, the portrait of her dead mother, the little school-room desk of her childhood, the Bible from which she had first spelled a psalm, were more than portions of her existence, they were part of herself, and of her best self.

She was gradually discovering, indeed, that she possessed two selves, the one clinging to righteousness, the other to wrong-doing. She swayed not between two purposes, but between two conflicts of opinion. She had made up her mind to go with

Delmar, but she could not assure herself whether such a step meant evil or not. She knew that it meant happiness.

Very pensively she began to make her preparations, and as the practical makes itself heard in a woman's breast, even when the heart is beating wildly, so she looked now at her well-filled drawers with a rueful face, wondering if indeed Huberte would so far forgive her afterwards as to pack and forward her trunks?

In the meantime, Delmar awaited his tryst in a state of mind bordering between hope and fear, as far as Zoë was concerned. Naturally he never doubted in himself or in his power of making her happy. What he had promised should be done, and having first arrived at the conclusion that her future was safer with him than with any other, was it not easy to go a step farther, and say—Then is not the

assurance of one sweet woman's happiness right in the eyes of God, however judged by man? He knew that he was doing a little evil that good might come. In a short time, perhaps a few weeks only, he should be free to make her his wife. All would be well, provided she trusted him implicitly.

He put away uneasy thoughts, therefore, and set off to the rencontre with a bounding heart. He felt so sure of beginning to live again after brighter fashion. This sweet Zoë would naturally transform his life much more than he could hope to change hers.

He was at the little station much too soon; but sitting down, folded his arms, and leaning back on the wall, closed his eyes, dreaming blissfully. He recalled their glorious holiday a few weeks back, going over every phase and incident of that autumn day with minute insistance. How lovely she had looked in her white dress!

How she had smiled upon him! How perfectly they understood each other! The saying of an old Greek poet occurred to him—God brings like to like—and he thanked Heaven for the blessed chance that had thrown them together.

After a little while he roused himself, looked at his watch, and walked up and down outside the station impatiently. Only a quarter of an hour remained before the train started. But he said to himself again and again—She will be here in time. She has promised!

No omnibus or hackney carriage now ran to this station, which was only a temporary erection, fast being supplanted by a new one, close to the great railway terminus of the town. The chief passengers, indeed, to the little port at this season were peasant and fisher folks, who tramped across the fields regardless of mud and rain, and the

enormous burdens with which they were charged. As a score of these arrived one after the other, and the business of weighing luggage began, he grew really anxious. He tried now to re-assure himself with the thought that Zoë could not wade knee-deep through the swamped fields, and had necessarily made a circuitous round in a fiacre, now with the reflection that there was no reason for her to arrive early. When the time of departure drew near, his expression changed from glowing expectation to white suspense. What had happened to delay or hinder her coming? Who could have stepped between them at the last moment? Again he checked himself. A few minutes still remained before the ticket office closed, and five minutes after that time before the train started. Perhaps all would yet come right.

Men bear this kind of suspense much

worse than women. Who has not watched a group of anxious-faced expectants gathered round the closed wicket of a *poste restante?* The men smoke, gossip, read newspapers, and have recourse to a dozen expedients by way of hiding the impatience that devours them. The women stand apart, calm, silent, though often white to the lips.

Delmar felt his presence of mind going at last. He fumbled for his watch, and looked at the hands with the vacant stare of a drunken man. He rushed from one end of the station to the other, breathing hard, bitter tears stinging his eyes, turning alternately red and pale. Two minutes more were left to hope, but it was the kind of hope that blanches the hair and ages us by years. Every trivial circumstance connected with it was engraved on his memory till his dying

day; the parting banter of porter and guard, the odd look of the clerk before closing the wicket, the plash of three large raindrops on his own hot brow, the station-master's blue-bloused little lad and his tame rabbit playing in the waiting-room, the cawing of crows about the turgid sky. And swift as lightning the most opposing thoughts crossed his mind. Zoë would come, and the life they should make together was brighter than any yet enjoyed by mortals. Zoë had drawn back at the last, and he loved her all the more for the lapse. One moment he blamed her altered purpose, the next he approved. He said to himself alternately—she is false—she is true. He breathed hard, and when the train moved off, sank on a seat deeply agitated. On arriving home to find a not unkind but firm word of adieu from Zoë, he answered her letter in a strain

of passionate self-reproach. Would she think pityingly of the wanderer? Would she forgive his bold request? He said little more than this, but no more was needed.

CHAPTER XVI.

HUBERTE SPEAKS HER MIND.

JUST as Zoë's preparations were finished, Huberte had unexpectedly entered, and, with a quick instinct, divined at a glance that something unusual was happening.

"You are going to take a journey. You are running away with Monsieur Delmar," she said, looking at her friend's travelling-bag inquisitively. "Why should you try to deceive me? Have I not ever been your friend?"

"You have said it; I am going away with Mr. Delmar," Zoë answered, quite calmly.

The sight of Huberte seemed almost reassuring to her. A moment before she had felt overcome with a sense of a kind of unearthly fear. Huberte's familiar voice brought back realities.

She sat down, dropping bag, cloak, and umbrella on the ground, leaning back with a sense of relief. The last hour or two had tried her bodily and mentally. It was comforting to have done with secret misgivings, and to be able to face the arch-enemy—Doubt—boldly in Huberte's presence.

"There is nothing to say," she added, in the same calm, unfaltering manner, "except that I am going with him to America, and there we shall be married."

Huberte sat still for some minutes, looking on the ground with flaming cheeks and angry tears. Then she said, uttering the words as if they were an oracular response,

and must, for once and for all, settle every point of the question at issue,

"Men are vipers!"

"I am not a child," Zoë replied. "A time comes when we must stand alone. Do not blame Mr. Delmar, but me."

"Men are scorpions!" cried Huberte, stamping angrily on the floor, "and your so-called kinsman no better than the rest. Was there ever a more villainous intrigue? And you English boast of your virtue! He finds you out here, an unprotected girl in a foreign city; he makes love to you under the guise of friendliness and relationship; he worms himself into your confidence, and then, taking advantage of unexpected circumstances in his favour, he proposes to make you——"

Zoë put up her hands to her ears, and whitened with emotion as Huberte was whitening with rage.

"Not that word, Huberte," she said, shudderingly. "You know you are trying to terrify me," and she repeated, "We shall be married in America."

Huberte laughed with cruel scorn.

"My poor Zoë, how little you understand what you are talking about! You Englishwomen are reared prudishly, and live with your eyes shut, whilst in France even an innocent girl is taught to call things by their proper names. Listen to me!"

"It is too late now," Zoë said, clutching her bag and cloak. "Forgive me, Huberte, for behaving ungratefully to you. It is that I am most troubled about," and the expression of her face said plainly enough —The rest does not matter.

"I always thought you were made of stronger stuff than most of us. I expected something extraordinary of you. But there

is no salvation for women," Huberte said, dry-eyed and inquisitorial.

"I have promised," Zoë answered, roused to a sudden consciousness of the waiting Delmar and the flying moments. "God have pity upon me, Huberte, for the sorrow I am bringing upon you. I know that I am acting unfairly to my friend."

"It is not the sorrow I mind about. One trouble more or less makes little difference in a life like mine; but have you given no heed to the ruin? How can I ever hold up my head again, when my bosom-friend, my sister by adoption, my fellow-worker has—has—has sold her soul to the devil? People will see in me the abettor and partner of your shame. Your dishonour must be mine."

Zoë stood on the threshold ready to go, listening without a word.

"I shall give up the school and go to

Aunt Félicité. She, at least, will take me in till I find something to do. To stay here is impossible. The ladies of our committee will hold up their skirts lest they brush me in the street. My pupils will despise me. Oh, it is cruel!" and saying this, Huberte turned her back upon her friend, and leaning her face on the window-sill, sobbed aloud.

At that moment, there was another and no less desolate image present to Zoë's mind. Torn by divided pity and divided love, she remained standing—one hand on the door-handle, the other holding her travelling things.

"Go!" Huberte cried. "Pay no heed to me. When the man is wearied of you and casts you off, the woman will still have compassion upon her friend, and forgive. If you disgrace yourself seven times seven, Zoë, your poor Huberte will share her last

crust with you. I hate your folly, your wickedness, but I cannot bring myself to hate you. You have my last word."

The last word stung, melted, conquered. Zoë threw down her burden, and going to her friend's side, held her tight, declaring that nothing should separate them. For a few minutes they wept in each other's arms, as the manner of women is, then sitting down, with clasped hands, they talked for awhile in closest confidence. Soon the chiming of a neighbouring church clock told Zoë that the hour of her tryst was over, and she breathed more freely. At least he knew his fate!

Prompted by Huberte she penned her little note of farewell at once, and when it was despatched made a compact that henceforth her kinsman's name should never be mentioned between them. Then she set to work to hide every souvenir; the scrappy

little notes appointing holiday meetings, the books he had given to her, the books he had once borrowed of her—all these relics must be kept out of sight for the present. Some day, when she should have grown strong and wise, they should have a little casket to themselves, to be opened secretly, and on Sabbath days only!

A letter of invitation from Mrs. O'Meara lay on the table. She tore it up, determined not to go to her kind friend's house just yet. There was always the possibility of meeting Father Gabriel, and the prospect of a talk with him was now insupportable. She little knew that he had made up his mind to avoid Mrs. O'Meara on her account.

That very evening, Delmar took leave of Father Gabriel.

"You will let me hear from you, I know," said the former, as the two drank

a last bottle of wine together. "I shall anxiously watch the progress of your philosophical studies, which may lead you much farther than you as yet imagine."

And saying this, he glanced at his companion curiously.

"If I dreamed of being led too far, I would give them up to-morrow," replied the young man, warmly. "Why will you ever throw out hints of that kind? Do you wish to see me a renegade, an apostate?"

Delmar was silent.

"I will modify my proposition," added the monk, in the same eager tone. "Do you wish to see me other than I am?"

"I cannot deny it. I must consistently, and by the very nature of things, regard your belief as superstitious, your ideas of duty anomalous, your career irrational. Not to do so were the height of inconsistency on

my part. I never intended to speak so plainly, but as we are on the eve of a long, perhaps even a final separation, I will be open with you."

"Pray have no hesitation in saying all that is on your mind. I should be a poor creature indeed were I to shrink from the plain-speaking of an honest man. I am passing through a spiritual crisis. I need to be confirmed in my faith. Proceed."

Delmar put aside his cigar, and fixing his dark eyes on the young man's anxious face, began, in that calm, deliberate manner with which he was accustomed to speak of important matters, once or twice rising to a passionate key, never for a moment losing sight of the interests involved.

"You ask for my opinions, and I will give them, all the more readily because of the personal regard we feel for each other. When I first knew you, I very often touched

upon your theology from an argumentative point of view, and you encouraged me, seeing in these intellectual combats the best possible wrestling ground for an intellectual athlete. But of late I have desisted. We have, as if by mutual consent, discussed philosophy, metaphysics, politics—anything but religion and religious dogmas. And why? Because your own mind has swayed between reason and unreason—because you have dreaded, not the power of your adversary, but the power of conviction."

Father Gabriel raised his hands deprecatingly, and made an effort to protest, but Delmar motioned him to be silent, and went on—

"You are an ardent believer; you have embraced the monastic career in a spirit of self-abnegation worthy of the Middle Ages; you are blind to the blemishes that disfigure your church as an institution; lastly, you

are young, you are aspiring, you are pure! Be warned by me; the time is gone by when the ideal of your riper years can be found inside the monastery walls. The force of conviction, conscience, understanding, call it what we will, is already making itself felt within. You have outlived that stage when self-deception upon self-deception is possible; you are, indeed, no longer at one with the world and yourself."

"If I have betrayed signs of occasional inner conflict, remember they are only spiritual ordeals through which all must pass," answered the monk, when he had partially recovered self-possession. Delmar's speech had staggered him not a little. "It is in the nature of mortal man to suffer temptation," he added. "Were it otherwise, the crown of eternal felicity would be easily won indeed."

The other's lips curled, and again his

penetrating glance measured his friend's look of redundant health, vivacity, and beauty, certainly not of an ascetic type.

"And if it is not in his power to resist?" he said.

The monk opened his eyes with well-affected ingenuousness.

"Explain yourself, my friend. I confess, for the first time, you are riddling to me."

"I mean simply this: supposing that these inner conflicts are not to be settled, that, by little and little, you are brought to recognise such conflicts as the outgrowth of an antiquated belief and an unnatural life, would not reason—would not duty bid you swerve from that creed, and relinquish that life?"

"Ah!" cried Father Gabriel, growing agitated, "perhaps I have betrayed too keen an interest in worldly things—perhaps I have

showed too much sympathy for your beautiful kinswoman! You look upon me already as of the world, worldly, but believe me, I would suffer martyrdom rather than desert my holy calling now."

"Well," Delmar said conciliatingly, "what ever happens to you, I am your friend. If my prognostics come true——"

"Your prognostics, my friend?"

"If ever you are led to see things as I see them, then remember that you can turn to Lionel Delmar as a brother. Here is my address for the present. I shall often think of you in the New World."

"And I shall often think of you in the quiet of my cell. Adieu, adieu."

"Farewell, Brother Gabriel. Since you have been to me as a brother, I prefer so to call you. May we meet again!"

For the second time, then, the three

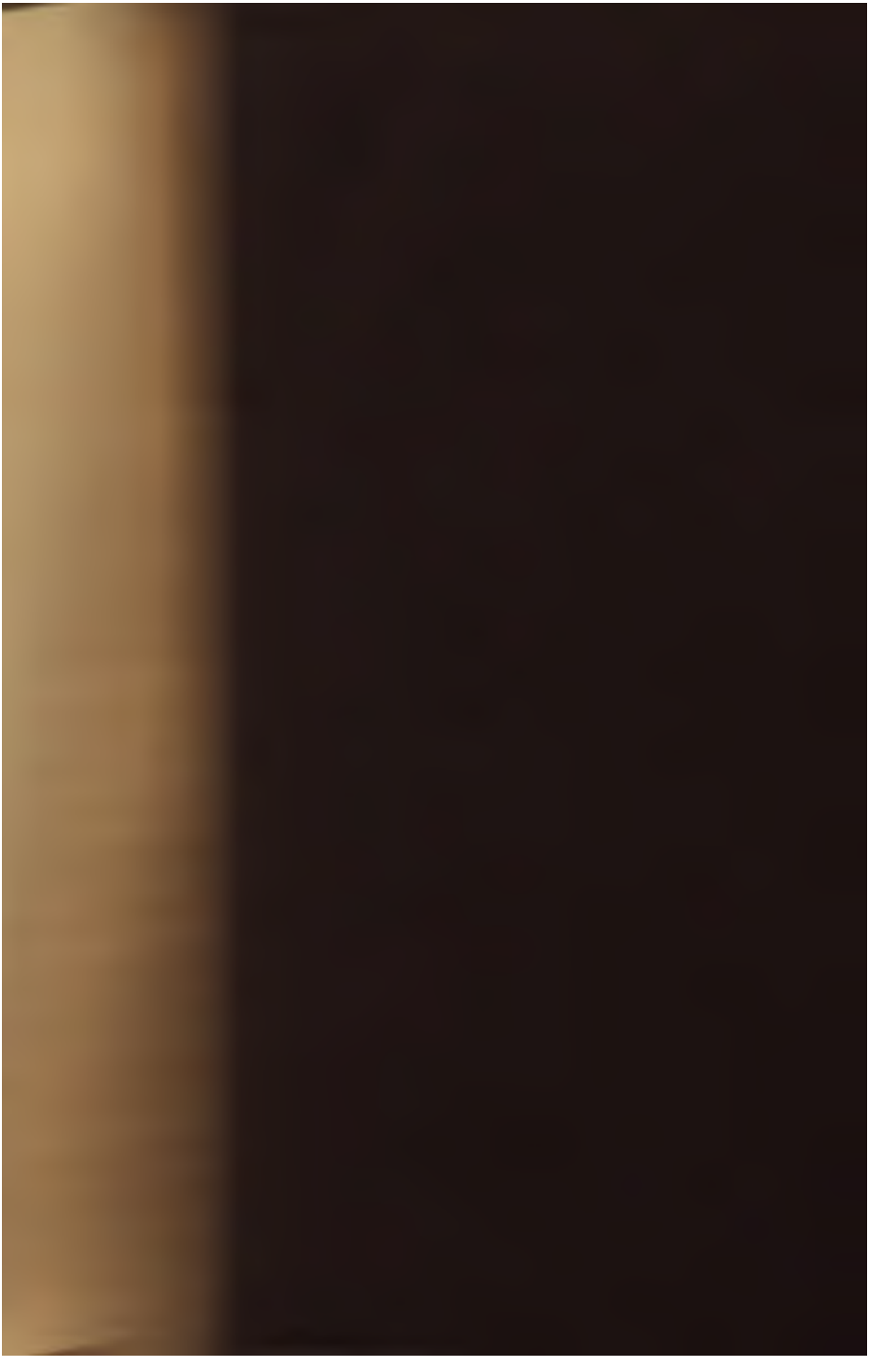
friends were divided, and, as it seemed, without any hope of re-union. What, indeed, could bring them together? Humanly speaking, such a consummation seemed impossible. Delmar's lonely heart yearned more fondly than ever to the transparent nature of the young monk, who, in his turn, never felt the need of his friend's wide experience and worldly wisdom as much as now. Both worshipped Zoë afar off, and she felt that with the last few weeks all that was intensest and best in her life had begun and ended. But Delmar sailed for the New World, and the friends he left behind were separated as far as outward circumstances could separate them. How then should these three any more influence each other, whether for good or evil?

Such kind of questioning occurs in life. But there is nothing so marvellous in human

existence as its continuity and independence of possibilities. Let us pause ere uttering the dread word nevermore!

THE END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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